Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

The Literary Criterion

Editor:
C. D. NARASIMHAIAH
University of Mysore, Mysore

ESSAYS ON AMERICAN LITERATURE

Presented to DR OLIVE I. REDDICK

Vol. VI **SUMMER 1964** **No. 2**

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Subscription Notice

The Literary Criterion is published *twice* a year and *four* issues constitute one volume. Subscriptions are generally for a volume: Rs. 20 for institutions and Rs. 10 for individuals. Single copies cost Rs. 5 (in all cases post free). But to suit subscribers of modest means annual subscriptions will also be received though accounting becomes cumbersome. You will be helping us run the journal efficiently (there is hardly any secretarial help) by paying your subscription for the entire volume.

Contributions neatly typed on one side of the paper only may please be sent to the Editor, *The Literary Criterion*, Professors' Quarters, Mysore-5.

Subscriptions, Advertisements and other business correspondence should be sent to Popular Prakashan, 35 C Tardeo Road, Bombay-34, W.B.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

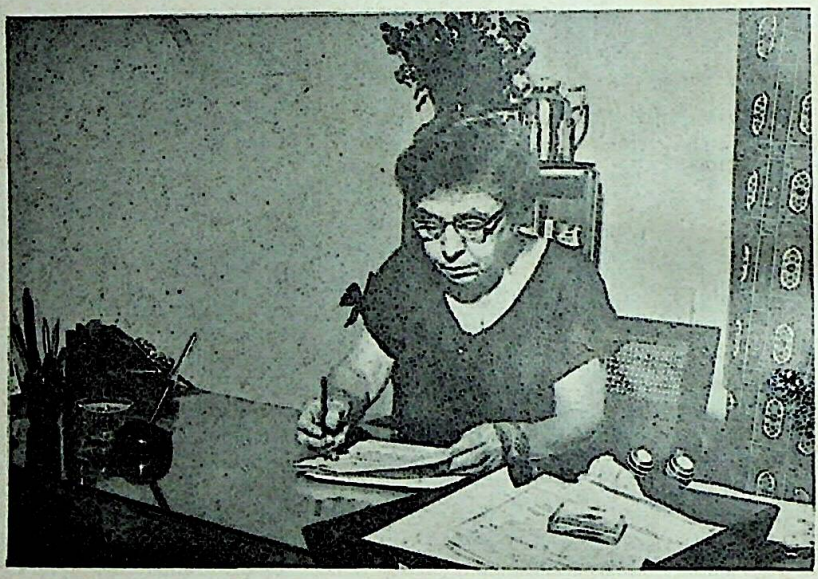
Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS



Dr Olive I. Reddick

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

THE LITERARY CRITERION

Editor :
C. D. NARASIMHAIAH
University of Mysore, Mysore

ESSAYS ON AMERICAN LITERATURE

Presented to DR OLIVE I. REDDICK

Vol. VI **SUMMER 1964** **No. 2**

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

CONTENTS

		PAGE
Foreword	*C.D.N.*	iii
The Nature of Colonial American Writing	*Charles Boewe*	1
The Grandissimes: 'A Minor Masterpiece'	*R. N. Mehta*	16
'The Scarlet Letter' without Allegory	*V. K. Chari*	23
Hawthorne's Criticism of the Puritan Society in 'The Scarlet Letter'	*O. P. Grewal*	26
The Orient in Whitman's 'Passage to India'	*Thakur Guru Prasad*	31
The Love Poetry of Emily Dickinson	*Salamatullah Khan*	37
Emily Dickinson and the Living Word	*I. N. Agrawal*	52
'The Portrait of a Lady': Its Moral Design	*P. S. Chauhan*	56
Modern American Poetry	*C. D. Narasimhaiah*	71
The Well-Wrought Jar of Wallace Stevens	*D. V. K. Raghavacharyulu*	89
Form and Viewpoint in the Poetry of Conrad Aiken	*Reuel Denney*	93
'The Tooth of Wit' and the 'Velvet Paw'	*M. K. Naik*	107
'Absalom, Absalom!' by William Faulkner—An Interpretation	*S. K. Narain*	116
Producing 'Abe Lincoln in Illinois' for University Audiences in India	*Tom A. Noonan*	123
The themes of O'Neill's 'The Iceman Cometh'	*S. Nagarajan*	127

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Dr. S. C. Bhattacharya
North Bengal University.
1964.

FOREWORD

The Literary Criterion is bringing out its second number (the first was in 1962 Winter) on American literature. It consists of papers which were first read or discussed at the Mussoorie Workshop for Teachers of American History and Literature organised by the United States Education Foundation in India, last summer. Between the two volumes, *The Literary Criterion* has covered a wide range of American literature, and considering our acquaintance of less than ten years with this new literature, the Indian scholars—mostly younger people —must be said to have done a creditable job indeed. It is as much a tribute to the characteristic Indian virtue ('Let noble thoughts come to us from every direction', says the *Rig Veda*) of assimilating the cultures of other lands, as to the vision and dynamism of Dr Olive Reddick, presiding over the destinies of the U.S.E.F.I. for more than a decade. Alas, she is retiring from it very soon, having now found a successor in Professor Norman Dawes who, we have no doubt, will continue the excellent work of his predecessor.

The present volume has appeared sooner than it normally does. And that was prompted by many considerations, chiefly the impending retirement of Dr Reddick and the inauguration this April of the American Studies Research Centre at Hyderabad, which owes its birth to the efforts of Dr Reddick who followed up so ably the recommendation of the Indian scholars met at Mussoorie in 1962. It is appropriate therefore that this volume of essays on American literature contributed by the Workshop participants should be presented to Dr Reddick at the inauguration of the Research Centre.

Here in our midst is an unsophisticated American woman identifying herself with the Foundation and achieving a degree of success which might well be the envy of political dignitaries holding spectacular offices. She came to India in 1921 and taught for several years at Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow and returned to her country for a brief period as 'India expert'. 'In those days', recalls Dr Reddick with a modesty which cuts

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

both ways, 'you did not need to know much to be an India expert.' Which shows an awareness of how much one ought to know to be an expert. She has brought to her work, first and foremost, a spirit of dedication, an imaginative approach to understanding the people she seeks to serve and then to fight her way to the cherished goal. And to her task she brings, too, a robust common sense, tact, firmness, integrity, a resilience of mind which admits of give and take and above all that magic key which she holds to the labyrinth of Indian mind and heart—all of which have stood her in good stead in her dealings with College and University students, teachers and educational administrators, an incredibly large number of whom she knows so well—by reputation, name, face and inside knowledge of their work—that she could be a reliable consultant for confidential reports on them!

When the history of Indo-American relations of the past fifteen years comes to be written, no single American individual or organization has a claim like hers to the roll call of honour for promoting understanding and friendship through education.

She regrets, though, that she hasn't lived in an Indian village nor learnt an Indian language (though she claims her ayah understands her Hindi!) but she knows as well as others that she is as much at home in India as in America.

It is a pleasure and privilege for us to salute this distinguished American woman and wish her many years of happiness which a life of fulfilment must bring as reward. To others in responsible places like hers, her life and work are in the nature of an example and a challenge. And there can hardly be a more fitting tribute to her.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to thank all the contributors for their co-operation in bringing out this issue. I am grateful to my student, Krishnamurthy Aithal for reading the proofs and Mr Korula of the Wesley Press but for whose unsparing efforts this number could not have been printed so expeditiously.

C.D.N.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

THE NATURE OF COLONIAL AMERICAN WRITING

CHARLES BOEWE

AMERICAN literature began as adventure. The earliest accounts resulting from the discovery of the North American continent were adventure stories, suspense-filled tales of exciting exploration in a land mysterious because unknown, exotic because different from Europe; a land peopled by strange savages; filled with a flora and fauna often unusual, possibly dangerous; full of riches, it was assumed, that were waiting to be exploited by those who had the courage and hardihood to confront the unknown. To the readers of this writing the subject was nothing less than the greatest terrestrial exploration undertaken by ever-inquisitive mankind. No doubt European readers thrilled vicariously to these adventures as today we thrill to the fragmentary reports of adventures now beginning to probe the mysteries of extra-terrestrial space.

I

Though the Norse navigator Herjulfson probably glimpsed the North American continent in A.D. 986, and Leif Ericson settled a short-lived colony in Vineland about the year 1,000, the first extensive document dated from the New World is the letter by Columbus (*c.* 1451-1506) published in April of 1493 in a Spanish version in Barcelona, and later in the same year in a Latin version in Rome. This is the beginning of American literature. While mistaken in his belief that he had touched the eastern coast of Asia, Columbus could rightly boast that as far as Europeans were concerned he and his men had 'attained that which hitherto mortal men have never reached'. Others had conjectured, he said, but his was an eye-witness account beside which all others 'seem like fables'.

For all its air of being a matter-of-fact report to his sponsors, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, Columbus's letter also spoke of the fabulous, of vegetation far more luxurious than that known in Spain, of natives who received the white men

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

as the 'celestial people', even of the inhabitants of Anan who, Columbus was told, are born with tails. At the same time the report laid down detailed accounts of the distances between islands in the West Indies, of their approximate size, and of the observed and reported customs of the people. Neither the hope for gain nor the professed desire to convert the natives to Christianity was sufficient motive for Columbus to dwell so long on the kinds of people he encountered; he wrote about them at length for the very good reason that human beings like to read about other people. So here we find descriptions of these people's physical appearance, something of their social organization, their methods of defence, even an account of a tribe of women warriors said to armor themselves in copper—the last of which reminds us of the difficulty of making an objective description of that which is wholly unknown—if there were not Amazons in the New World there should have been. But the opportunity for economic gain —a theme that runs through all the early adventures—is by no means neglected either. In this land, Columbus promises, his sponsors will find as much gold as they will ever need, and he makes the telling point that the innocent natives are content to trade their gold for pieces of broken glass bottles. Untold riches to be claimed and the opportunity to bring Christianity to the natives while relieving them of wealth that in their ignorance they cannot enjoy—this is the sweet prospect of America as it first appears in literature!

Nearly a century later, as part of the out-pouring of restless Renaissance energy, attempts to colonize the Atlantic seaboard resulted in reports to European investors that have considerable literary as well as historical value. Despite the early settlements by Dutch, Swedes, Spanish, French, and others, the writings that emerge at the beginning of the seventeenth century as the first true documents of American literature were written mostly by Englishmen, in the English language. The English culture supporting this writing, the culture out of which America would grow, was that of the fructifying period of Queen Elizabeth, James I, Charles I; the England of Shakespeare and the King James' Bible, of Bacon and Milton. The language, then, of Thomas Hariot (1560-1621) and John Smith (1580-1631), who wrote representative reports, is English with new-minted freshness. The subject matter has the same freshness.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Whatever John Smith's shaky standing as a historian, he has every right to be thought of as one of the fathers of American literature. His first book, *A True Relation* (1608), published four years after the death of Queen Elizabeth and while Shakespeare was still a contemporary author, is written in the racy Elizabethan idiom, as are all his books. A chronicler of his own firsthand observations, he couched his narrative in the third person for dramatic effect, becoming as a result a character in his own adventure story. Nor was he one to be tyrannized over by mere facts. Captured by the Indian aborigines on the Chickahominy River, Smith tells us in *A True Relation* that he was guarded by eight warriors, but sixteen years later when he recounted the same story in *The General History of Virginia* (1624) his guards had become 'thirty or forty tall fellows'. More Indians, greater peril. Such discrepancies as these argue caution in accepting Smith as a trustworthy historian; they also demonstrate his sure instinct for a good story.

Smith was not only a good story teller but as an Elizabethan adventurer he lived a life that itself went into the making of America's later literary consciousness. And like other adventurers of the early years of exploration and settlement, he was compelled to write the literature of persuasion as much as that of sober description; here was a continent to be peopled, here were rival groups appealing for transatlantic patronage—historical accuracy often had to be sacrificed to persuasive rhetoric.

In *Good News from Virginia* (1613), Alexander Whitaker (1585-1614), one of whose claims to fame was that he converted Pocahontas to Christianity, could make Virginia seem groaning with delicious foodstuffs waiting to satisfy the hunger of all who would exert themselves enough to carry their appetites across the ocean. As for him, he had 'set so much corn', he writes, 'in the idle hours of one week as will suffice me for bread one quarter of a year'. He only neglected to remark on how much of it sprouted.

In the North some reporters got even more carried away by the bounties of the land. Francis Higginson (1586-1630) could make the raw New England air appear both a treat and a treatment. 'There is hardly a more healthful place to be found in the world that agreeth better with our English bodies', he wrote in *New England's Plantation* (1630). His own stomach ailment, which he

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

had had to pamper with 'drink as was both strong and stale,' had so improved that he could announce to his surprise that now he was able 'and do oftentimes drink New England water very well'. He rejoiced to observe that 'a sup of New England's air is better than a whole draft of old England's ale'—an endorsement slightly tarnished when he drew his last mortal breath in this same atmosphere the very year his book was published in England.

All such writing, properly speaking, was propaganda; it aimed to convince as much as to inform. Carefully used, it is still the raw material of history; but equally significant, it had some of the dimensions of imaginative literature as well. And it is not wholly a coincidence that such literature appeared in a land which would one day make the exaggeration of the tall tale a virtue of its native literature, a land where speech itself would come to be distinguished from the English of the mother country in part by greater reliance on overstatement as a rhetorical device.

II

It is chiefly with the New England settlers of the Seventeenth century that we come to a body of writing large enough to afford a comprehensive view of the colonial mind in America. This writing would be important for no other reason, yet there is a better one—the fact that, for better or worse, the New England group made a lasting impression on civilization in the United States which is still felt.

One trait of the New England Puritans which has to be emphasized is their sincerity. Their most unpleasant feature is likely to be that sincerity so rigid that they were blind to any opinion but their own. As the platitude has it, they did come to the New World to worship God as they pleased; but never for a moment did they suppose that others ought to have the same right in Puritan colonies.

What kind of writing did this unique American theocracy produce? The New England Puritans could not have written novels, for, while there had been narrative tales since antiquity, the novel as an art form was yet to be developed. They certainly might have written plays; but they did not because they thought the stage was wicked, as no doubt it was from their point of view. They did write poetry—an astonishing amount of it in view of the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

water to be drawn and the wood to be hewn in a new community—but we should not expect it to contain Keatsian lushness or Shelleyan grandeur; the romantic revolution was yet to come. A few of their poets, such as Edward Taylor or Anne Bradstreet, performed admirably if in a minor key.

What they did best of all was to write a firm, masculine expository prose. Essentially it was a utilitarian prose. Whether written to record memorable events, to recall sinners to the straight and narrow way, to hymn the praises of God, to refute wrong-thinking, or to illustrate the godly life as lived by some illustrious personage, it was written in a workmanlike manner to accomplish cleanly and efficiently the purpose the author had in mind. In other words, its intention was not to provide enjoyment as an end in itself but to inform and to convince. This is not the highest of literary aims, but it is an honorable one, and one requiring no little skill to accomplish well.

Much Puritan prose falls into two categories that today we are not likely to think of as literary at all. We might call one of these roughly 'historical chronicles', and the other 'sermons'—categories that will do well enough if we remember that the first includes such personal history as diaries, that the second includes such non-pulpit exercises as controversial religious tracts, and that both overlap. Perhaps, too, we should remind ourselves that if these are not the areas in which we expect to find literary excellence today our shift in sensibility is hardly the fault of the seventeenth century. It is refreshing to observe that John Dunton, a bookseller from London visiting Harvard College in 1686, when asked about the leading authors in England named those in three categories: divinity, philosophy—and mathematics. Literary studies might amount to something once again if they were equipped to take in mathematics.

A representative writer of historical chronicles and one of sermons will show something of the virtues of Puritan prose.

William Bradford (1590-1657) is pre-eminent among the historical writers. Joining the little group of Separatists at Scrooby in England when a lad of sixteen, he shared their troubles in Holland, came on the *Mayflower* with them to America, and, after the death of John Carver in 1621, served as their governor for thirty terms of office. The history of the enterprise which he began compiling about 1630 from his own letter-books and journals

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

tells the Pilgrims' story from the time of their persecutions in England down to the year 1646; for the third decade of the seventeenth century it is the whole history of New England, for Plymouth Colony, which they founded, was New England.

By no means a learned man in the formal sense, Bradford read widely for a person of his circumstance—his library was second only to that of the religious leader of the colony, Elder Brewster—and he sensibly tried to tell his story in 'plain style, with singular regard unto simple truth in all things', a style that owed not a little to the cadences of the Geneva (not King James) Bible, which the Pilgrims used.

Bradford and his friends had lived through momentous events which are interesting in the same way other adventures are. His account of the Narragansett challenge in 1622, with the foreboding threat implied by the snakeskin stuffed with arrows; his story of the overturn of Thomas Morton's establishment at Merrymount, and Captain Standish's firm resolution in the face of Morton's guns; and of course the voyage of the *Mayflower* itself, the seemingly endless ocean journey, the hardships encountered, the unruly sailors, and even the uncertainty of the landfall (they aimed at Virginia and hit Massachusetts)—all this is part of the physical adventure.

One notices, however, a peculiarity of Bradford's historical sense that makes his conception of what goes into historical writing somewhat different from that of the twentieth century. Bradford sees the process of history itself as the cosmic drama of a divine plan in which his people play a leading role. As John Winthrop said of the Puritans, they were in America to erect a 'City on the Hill', in full gaze of the whole watching world.

This attitude is characteristic of the Puritan historians. They may incidentally record much social history, and to illustrate God's personal concern with his people in New England they may retell many exciting adventures, but their purpose is neither to re-create the texture of day-to-day life nor to amuse us with tales of derring-do. They might all have written under Cotton Mather's title, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, for the purpose of all is to show the 'wonders of the Christian religion, flying from the deprivations of Europe, to the American strand', as Mather expressed it in the introduction of his book. Whatever we may think of the narrowness of this aim, it had two profound effects

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

on their writing. It meant that only those events capable of bodying forth religious significance were historically important (though many of the writers were masters at finding significance where we might not); and it gave the writers either—as you care to view it—a majestic certainty that what they did and said had ultimate significance, or a cocksure confidence in their own importance because God's eye was always on them.

Plymouth—and later the Bay Colony—had an especially difficult problem in the person of Thomas Morton (*c.* 1590-1647). An Anglican with Cavalier instincts, Morton had built a pleasure bower for himself next door to Plymouth, where the merrymaking of his men was a source of constant exasperation to the solemn Puritans. He was only honouring old English custom, said Morton in his book *New English Canaan* (1637), when he observed May Day with song and revels, ladled out beer with a generous hand, and beamed on his followers dancing innocently around a Maypole. But a song written for the occasion urged the 'Lasses in beaver coats come away, Ye shall be welcome to us night and day', and these were Indian girls, who shouldn't be there in the daytime, much less at night, the Puritans thought. There they were 'dancing and frisking together like so many fairies', Bradford thundered—'or furies, rather', he corrected himself, hinting darkly at even worse carryings on, 'beastly practices of the mad Bacchanalians'. And so grim old John Endecott went out with his axe and chopped down the Maypole, and 'admonished them to look there should be better walking'—all of which suggests there may be a grain of truth in the definition of the Puritan as a man who fears that somewhere, someone may be having a good time. But Morton would not be put down. Expelled and returned to England, he kept popping back, three times in all, until at last he died after a winter of wholesome rehabilitation in the primitive Boston jail.

Morton's own account of the squabbles set alongside Bradford's gives us one of the few chances in this period to compare different views on matters other than religious topics. Both agree that one cause for the dispute was the trade in beaver skins with the Indians. The truth seems to be that Morton traded circles around the Puritans in this valuable commodity (used to make hats in Europe), and with little effort of his own because the dissolute and unregenerate Indians who worked for him had a greater

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

hankering after his poetry than the Puritans' piety. Both writers are masters of invective who, in stating forceful cases for themselves, sometime inadvertently give the show away. When Morton's troop is captured by Myles Standish, Bradford says that one of them was so drunk 'that he ran his own nose upon the point of a sword' held by one of the Puritans—that is, the poor fellow stabbed himself through no fault of the sword wielder. Earlier, when Morton was the prisoner of Standish, whom he derisively calls Captain Shrimp, he managed to slip away in the dark, but afterwards imagined that he had lingered long enough to watch the silly Puritans bang 'their heads one at another full butt', like rams. Viewed alternately from either side the engagement has something of the flavour of slapstick comedy.

Morton could not answer Bradford's charge that he brought peril to them all by arming the Indians—a condition made all the worse, Bradford openly admits, because the Indians were better marksmen than the English. Here and elsewhere in the early chronicles the relationship of the whites and Indians tells us much about the Puritans' opinion of their unique mission in the world. It remained for the trans-Mississippi pioneers of the nineteenth century to define the good Indian as a dead Indian, but by 1640 Milford, Connecticut, had gone far toward that simple conclusion when its town meeting forth-rightly expressed its Indian policy in this syllogistic resolution: 'Voted, that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; voted, that the earth is given to the Saints; voted, that we are the Saints'.

In sixteenth-century Spain a great debate over the knotty question of whether or not the American Indians were human beings had concluded by granting the aborigines the benefit of the doubt, making them subject to slavery, robbery, conversion to Christianity, and other benefits of Western civilization. The seal of their humanity was set when thousands of them were honoured with the white man's tuberculosis and other peculiar distempers. Yet they were strange people hard to deal with. Lacking the enlightened concept of private ownership of real estate, they 'sold' huge tracts of land for a few trinkets, supposing the whites were only buying hunting rights—in their culture, all that was valuable—and were chagrined to see fences go up afterwards.

In respect to the Indians the Plymouth colonists were fortunate.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Arriving with the preconception that 'these savage barbarians' were 'readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise', Bradford soon learned that the Indians responded like English gentlemen to fair treatment and honest dealing. Squanto in particular, a man more widely travelled than any of the Pilgrims themselves, was a sophisticated man of the world who saved the settlers' lives by his timely lessons in native agriculture. How fortunate that years before he had been shanghaied and taken to England, and as a result spoke fluent English. If it is remembered that according to legend the Pilgrims left Holland because they discovered that their children were speaking better Dutch than English, one sees how deep are the roots of American monolingualism; even the first settlers had an itching belief that really decent people ought to speak in English. And as for the presence of an English-speaking Indian to greet them, this was nothing less than God's providence at work once more in behalf of his chosen people. However complacent they may have been about their good fortune, it is clear that fair dealing with the Indians paid off in fifty-four years of peace as a result of the treaty arranged with Massasoit, a treaty based on the Puritans' favoured legal instrument, the covenant.

Thus Bradford weaves his story from the threads of day-to-day events. That he keeps it always lively and interesting shows his ability to select the most telling details, to point up the dramatic contrasts inherent in his narrative, even to slant his material to emphasize his side in controversial matters. By no means a great writer, he is nevertheless a very good one, a writer who has full command of the basic technical skills of his craft.

III

Because clergymen took a leading position in both spiritual and secular affairs, it is hardly surprising that printed sermons and religious tracts bulk largest in the literary remains of colonial New England; ministers and intellectuals were virtually identical. The sermon was of central importance in Puritan intellectual life and, in New England especially, where it was possible for church and state to have free interplay, it was a kind of public formulation of the best that was being said and thought at a given time. Not an altar but a plain elevated pulpit dominated the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Puritan meeting house; this emphasis on the pre-eminence of public speech would remain a characteristic of American culture for generations after the Puritan impulse itself had waned.

Sermons were of course preached on Sunday—two of them, each about two hours long, plus psalm singing and usually an hour-long prayer—and there was a 'lecture' sermon on Thursday as well; the aim of all of them being to apply the theoretical principles of theology to the practical needs of the people, especially their salvation. It may be thought that the Puritan doctrines of predestination and of irresistible grace made exhortation from the pulpit superfluous. Not so. Both Calvinism and Covenant theology affirmed that conversion is a psychological process which has to pass through the recognizable stages of the conviction of sin, repentance, humiliation, to the stage of justification (where man is relieved of the consequences of original sin), and finally to sanctification, where the event of election occurs. The means of grace whereby this process is set in motion is the sermon (sometimes also the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper); since the un-regenerate man is ignorant of his own sinfulness, the preacher must use all the rhetorical resources at his command to bring about the sinner's initial enlightenment concerning his true condition. It is true that man cannot effect his own salvation; it is true that predestination has already established for all time who will be saved and who damned. Yet—and this is the beautiful paradox in the whole scheme—one *can* take a posture receptive to the salvation which may or may not be in store for him, and indeed must do so if grace is to work its wonders. Whatever one thinks of the theology involved, it is easy to see why the Puritan preacher had to be an accomplished orator.

In addition to the regular Sabbath sermons, there were three other kinds having broader social and political implications. Brought from England was the tradition of preaching sermons over condemned criminals before a hanging, where the honoree served the salutary function of a visible warning against the consequences of sin. Sometimes really gaudy effects could be had, as when, in 1686, the murderer James Morgan sat through two sermons by Cotton Mather and Joshua Moody, stood through another by Increase Mather at the foot of the gallows, and then topped the professionals by his own sermon, preached beside

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

his waiting coffin, where he confessed that he had come to this sad end by such gratuitous wickedness as going direct from the meetinghouse 'to commit sin and to please the lusts of my flesh' elsewhere.

Another special type was the 'artillery' sermon, preached by a leading minister whenever the militia was mustered for training. Because militiamen then followed the forgotten democratic practice of electing their officers, these sermons gave the ministers an opportunity to discuss the qualities of the good leader. And the third type was the election sermon, a place where the clergy took a direct part in the management of the state, for here they discoursed on the principles of political economy and on the characteristics needed, in both rulers and the electorate, to achieve political wisdom.

Not only were sermons the kind of discourse that Puritans were most exposed to, Puritan sermons followed a well-defined literary form which emphasized their logically arranged intellectual content. Puritan ministers were expected to be learned men, and their sermons demonstrate that they were. Harvard College and later Yale were established for the express purpose of training a learned clergy, as were all the colonial colleges except that in Philadelphia, where the Quaker rejection of an educated ministry left other interests more freedom.

The Puritan sermon began with the statement of a Scriptural text. This was followed by 'observations' on the text, often numbered for reference, and intended to elucidate it. Then followed numbered statements of 'doctrine' inferred from the text. And last, the 'application' of the text and doctrines to the situation of the hearers. Such a lawyer's brief was aimed primarily at the head rather than the heart; it was written in plain style that it might affect the understanding of anyone able to follow a logical argument; and, especially as the seventeenth century closed, it was often read from the pulpit with the least possible show of emotional pyrotechnics. How then do we account for emotional effect produced by the most famous Puritan sermon of all, Jonathan Edwards' 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'? According to a contemporary witness, before Edwards finished this sermon 'there was such a breathing of distress and weeping that the preacher was obliged to speak to the people and desire silence that he might be heard'. Some attention to the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

circumstances and content of this sermon alone will tell us much about the Puritan sermon as a literary form.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), born in Connecticut, a graduate of Yale College before he was seventeen years old, was the last great Puritan, and he was one of the few native Americans ever to make a notable contribution to original philosophy. It is not fair to his immense intellectual labours to represent him solely by 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'—itself typical of his sermons—and something of his other writings must be understood even to appreciate this sermon.

Edwards was not only a great logician who won his arguments by so annihilating his opponents' positions that they had no place left to stand, he was also a great Christian mystic who 'felt God' in thunderstorms and exulted to 'see the lightnings play and hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder', as he says in *Personal Narrative* (1765), his spiritual autobiography. And he was as well a man of the inquisitive eighteenth century who had made a small but notable contribution to natural science at the tender age of eleven, when he wrote the first account of the ballooning spider, a descriptive report as good as any written by professional naturalists at the time. Late in life he chanced upon his first novel—*Sir Charles Grandison*, by Samuel Richardson—and was so delighted with it that he began an analysis of style to see how anything as frivolous as a mere novel could give such pleasure. Yet, however unconscious he had been of it, his own style had perfectly fitted his purpose.

In 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God' (1741) he brought the whole tradition of Puritan pulpit literature to a blinding focus. Though Edwards seldom preached such fire-and-brimstone sermons and most of his pulpit oratory dwelt on God's love rather than his wrath, readers have been right in preferring this sermon to all others as literature. Even without an underlying stimulus of Christian conviction, one reads it as a memorable literary experience; many readers find in it something of the fascination of the macabre shudder they get from certain of Poe's tales.

The contemporary reputation of the sermon is bound up with the historical events of the Great Awakening, that last conflagration of religious enthusiasm to come out of the Puritan movement which, because of its very emotionalism, looked forward

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

to the diminished cerebral content of Protestantism in the following centuries. The Great Awakening, anticipated in the Connecticut Valley in 1734, reaching a floodtide in New England in 1741-42, eventually swept over the whole eastern seaboard from Maine to Georgia, leaving a soggy mess of self-confessed sinners in its wake. It owed much to evangelists like the visitor George Whitefield from England, but the way had been prepared for it in New England long before, when the Half-Way Covenant admitted to church membership people who had not been tempered in the searing fires of conversion. By the 1740's church pews were filled with lukewarm Christians in need of a roasting. Edwards was one of the men most capable of doing this.

Though he had repeatedly made the point that 'the essence of all true religion lies in holy love', as he put it in his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), his task in the famous sermon at Enfield was to penetrate the callous exteriors of the uncommitted nominal Christians and, by forcing their understandings to accept the terrors of God's wrath, cause their wills to direct their feet along the path of salvation. He did this primarily with adroit metaphors, using images which would at once merge idea and sensation in so compelling a way as to enforce belief. Most of his images either make one feel the pent-up pressure of God's anger ('the wrath of God is like great waters that are damned for the present; they increase more and more'), or they produce a sinking feeling that one swings helplessly over abysmal dangers ('you hang by a slender thread . . . nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath'). Hell itself is hardly pictured at all. Rather, interest focuses on the impotent sinner dangling 'over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over a fire. . . .' It surprises him, says the preacher, that all the people sitting there in front of him did not drop into hell last night in their sleep; 'if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell than a spider's web would have to stop a fallen rock'. Though Edwards read his discourse in a calm voice, scarcely looking up from his sermon book, it is little wonder some of his hearers fell into convulsions before he was finished.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Whatever one's reservations about such strenuous religious exercises, this sermon may be seen as an epitome of the Puritan preacher's forensic skill. Even within the limitations of plain style, the speaker achieves his effect largely by his skill at striking off memorable and moving phrases, an ability suggested by a few random sermon titles alone: John Cotton's 'Wading in Grace', Increase Mather's 'Arrow against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing', or William Hooke's 'New England's Tears for Old England's Fears'. With little conscious attention to the subtleties of style, these ministers achieved one goal of the stylist anyway—to fit the garment perfectly to the frame it covered.

IV

In the long run, though, what judgment shall we make of colonial American writing as literature? After the best that can be said for it, does it not lack the dimensions that make it a living literature? Little remains today of the bases of belief that motivated it; however it may have spoken to men three hundred years ago, it does not speak to them now; and even as history it has little more than a quaint and antique charm. As contrasted, say, to American writing of the nineteenth and especially the twentieth century, isn't it rather sorry stuff, fit only for the researches of antiquarians? Special pleading will not dispose of such objections.

To the literary historian, however, the beginnings of a national literature have a natural importance as the seedbed from which a sturdy plant has grown. Unless we go back to the start—and with a literature written by colonials, beyond the start—we can never hope to trace the arc of development we believe to exist, we can never find the historical order which makes the individual text meaningful in relation to the whole.

To the critic, too, an understanding of colonial American writing is suggestive. If there is no doubt of the stature of nineteenth century writers such as Hawthorne, Melville, Dickinson, Poe, the appreciation of their accomplishment is nonetheless enhanced when we understand the cultural milieu out of which, several generations removed, they grew and against which they explored the power of blackness. If Henry James and, in the early twentieth century, the expatriate writers were repelled by

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

much that they found in American culture, they too were the inheritors of a part of the legacy of America's colonial experience.

The course of literature in the United States is no more 'explained' by the single strand of historical development than by any other simplistic explanation. But without some acquaintance with that history, from its beginnings onward, one reads contemporary authors like a person who enters the theatre during the third act, and must forever wonder what the play is about.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

THE GRANDISSIMES: 'A MINOR MASTERPIECE'

R. N. Mehta

For the few years that 'American Literature' as a subject has found a place in the curricula of some of our universities our attention has not unnaturally tended to focus on the better-known books of that literature. And that is as it should be. It is only proper that we should be spending practically all the time that we can spare for American Literature in discussing *The Scarlet Letter* or *Moby Dick* or *Huckleberry Finn*. At the same time it seems to me that we could usefully devote some at least of our attention to a few of the lesser known works of American Literature—works which though naturally not so inherently great as the established 'classics' have nevertheless a relevance and a validity which no serious student of the subject can for long afford to ignore. George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes*, I suggest, is one such 'minor masterpiece' that we would do well to notice.

First published serially in *Scribner's Monthly* in 1879, *The Grandissimes* appeared in book form in the following year, i.e. five years before *Huckleberry Finn*, six before *The Princess Casamassima*, and sixteen before *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. If I seem to drag in *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Princess Casamassima*, it is because I feel it is necessary to assert that in his understanding and intensity of rendering of the negro problem as well as in his unwearying—and often effective—use of dialect speech Cable is close to Mark Twain; whereas the quality of social and political insights that inform the *Grandissimes* have in nineteenth century American fiction a possible parallel only in James's novel. In popular imagination, however, Cable has usually been associated with the group of writers known as the Local Colorists. And there are obvious resemblances, say, between such a thing as Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* and *The Grandissimes*. In both there is a meticulous, faithful, affectionate rendering of the local landscape, of the seasons and their changes, of the humours and habits of the people of a rather small areas,

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

and above all a conscientious use of the local dialect. One needs considerable reserves of patience and indulgence often to get to the bare prose meaning through the thick maze of dialect speech in some of these novels. But while *The Country on the Pointed Firs* is a collection of episodes and incidents loosely strung up together, and taking place on the seacosts of Maine, *The Grandissimes* with all its dross of dialect (not all of which is tiresome or trite), facetious humour and some sentimentality reaches out to times and meanings far beyond anything in any of the Local Colorists. The magnificent and terrible story of the negro prince Bras Coupé, for instance, might have come straight from the pages of one of Faulkner's novels. Whereas a passage such as the following seems to have links with both Hawthorne and James:

> Frowenfeld noticed them while they were yet in the middle of the grounds. He could hardly have failed to do so, for some one close beside his bench in undoubted allusion to one of the approaching figures exclaimed: 'Here comes Honore Grandissime.'
>
> Moreover, at that moment there was a slight unwonted stir on the Place d' Armes. It began at the farther corner of the square, hard by the Principal, and spread so quickly through the groups nearabout, that in a minute the entire company were quickly made aware of something going notably wrong in their immediate presence. There was no running to see it. There seemed to be not so much much as any verbal communication of the matter from mouth to mouth. Rather a consciousness appeared to catch noiselessly from one to another as the knowledge of human intrusion comes to groups of deer in a park![1]

A phrase like 'verbal communication of the matter' with its flavour of a certain formality and primness, with even its stiffness, is something one might perhaps come across in Hawthorne, but not in James, not certainly the James of the period after *The Portrait of a Lady*. But what strikes one here is the quality of sensibility that is expressed. It seems to me to have affinities with Hawthorne and James and even Faulkner, and a sentence like, 'Rather a consciousness appeared to catch noiselessly from one to another as the knowledge of human intrusion comes to groups of deer in a park' in particular has, I feel, the kind of

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

power and surprise we are used to expecting only in the great writers. It is not altogether surprising that in his lifetime Cable came to be regarded as the peer of James and Mark Twain. My point is that *The Grandissimes* needs to be distinguished from the novels of the other Local Colorists, and to be seen as a serious achievement having affinities with the great works of American fiction.

The opening of the novel is a little baffling and the geneological details that Cable offers are not likely to leave the average reader much wiser as to what is happening, to who and why, but from among a tangle of names and people two main figures emerge after the first few pages. One of these is Frowenfeld, a Yankee pharmacist who comes to the established aristocratic Creole society of New Orleans with radical republican ideas and scant respect for the age-old institution of slavery. In the course of the novel Frowenfeld matures to a more sympathetic understanding of the Creole society, though till the end he remains, I am afraid, something of a prig. Like the typical Yankee he makes good in business, evinces excellent practical sense, at one point even staves off a duel and finally wins the hand and fortune of Clotilde Nancanou.

The other, more complex, figure is that of Honore Grandissime the white, scion of the Grandissime family, handsome, refined, thoughtful. Honore has had his education in Paris, and much to the discomfiture of his family, has returned home with disturbing ideas of social equality and compromise. He is the only Creole who has come to realize that the tottering edifice of New Orleans society is based on an unjust principle, that the prejudices of caste which bedevil Creole society must somehow be broken down. It is he again who, flouting popular Creole sentiment, attempts to patch up some kind of understanding between the Yankee rulers and his own people. Honore has his finger on what is wrong with Creole society when he says:

> 'Did you ever hear of a more perfect specimen of Creole pride? That is the way with all of them. Show me any Creole, or any number of Creoles, in any sort of contest, and right down at the foundation of it all, I will find you this same preposterous, apathetic, fantastic, suicidal pride. It is as lethargic and ferocious as an alligator'.[2]

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

And again, talking of slavery to Frowenfeld he says:

'Ah! my-de'-seh, when I try sometimes to stand outside and look at it, I am *ama-aze* at the length, the blackness of that shadow! . . . It is the *Nemisis* w'ich, instead of coming afteh, glides along by the side of this morhal, political, commercial, social mistake! It blanches, my-de'-seh, ow whole civilization! It drhags us a centurhy behind the rhes' of the world! It rhetahds and poisons everhy industrhy we got!—mos' of all our-h immense agrhicultu'e! It brheeds a thousain' cusses that nevva leave home but jus' flutter-h up an' rhoost, my-de' -seh on ow *heads;* an' we neuva know it!—yes, sometimes some of us know it.'[3]

Among the other male characters is the other Honore, the quadroon half-brother of Honore the white, who haunts the latter and the book like an ineradicable past, and who though futilely and fatally in love with the negro girl Palmyre has yet enough hatred of the white man left in him to drive a knife three times through the proudest pillar of Creole aristocracy, Agricole Fusilier. Agricole Honore's uncle, is a magnificent embodiment of the Creole pride which his nephew had so accurately diagnosed as the disease infecting the Creoles. His prejudices familial, political, racial are deep and strong, and it is natural that he can't tolerate the fancy radical notions of Honore or Frowenfeld. There is a touching scene in which Agricole rushes to take Frowenfeld under his ample wing when the latter's pharmacy has been wrecked by some Creoles who take him for a meddling upstart and friend of the negroes.

The two De Grapion women, Clotilde and Aurore, take up a considerable portion of the novel. There is something gallant and chivalric in Cable's treatment of these two, something indulgent and at the same time playful, if not positively 'kittenish'. Howells drooled over them. 'Aurore', he said, 'is one of the most delicious creatures I ever knew'.

The Grandissimes, however, derives its power not so much from a set of memorable characters—interesting though these are—as from the clash between established aristocratic prejudices, attitudes and expectations and the influx of new and radically different ideas, between, that is, Creole pride and Yankee idealism; at another level between the two families, the De Grapions and

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

the Grandissimes, who have been carrying on a violent feud for two generations. And finally and most importantly it derives its power from the clash of Creole white and negro black. For we must remember that at the centre of the novel, told three times in one day, and told with tremendous verve and zest and an amount of irony is the story of Bras Coupé. It is adequately and skilfully prepared for in the first half of the book, and the shadow of the Ethiopian lies across the entire action of the novel. Here is the kind of thing we have:

> The Spaniard showed himself very merciful—for a Spaniard; he spared the captive's life. He might have been more merciful still; but Honore Gradissime said some indignant things in the African's favor, and as much to teach the Grandissimes a lesson as to punish the runaway, he would have repented his clemency, as he repented the momentary truce with Agricola, but for the tearful pleading of the señōra and the hot, dry eyes of her maid. Because of these he overlooked the offence against his person and estate, and delivered Bras Coupé to the law to suffer only the penalties of the crime he had committed against society by attempting to be a free man.[4]

Bras Coupé's end as Cable describes it has, according to some critics, a trace of false and untrue feeling, of the sentimental. I am not sure that this is on the whole true. In spite of the inherently 'sentimental' situation I find this part of the novel quite effective:

> The lady came, her infant boy in her arms, knelt down beside the bed of sweet grass and set the child within the hollow of the African's arm. Bras Coupé turned his gaze upon it; it smiled, its mother's smile, and put its hand upon the runaway's face, and the first tears of Bras Coupé's life, the dying testimony of his humanity, gushed from his eyes and rolled down his cheek upon the infant's hand. He laid his own tenderly upon the babe's forehead, then removing it, waved it abroad, inaudibly moved his lips, dropped his arm, and closed his eyes. The curse was lifted.
>
> 'Le pauv dgiab!' said the overseer, wiping his eyes and looking fieldward. 'Palmyre, you must get the priest'.
>
> The priest came, in the identical gown in which he had appeared the night of the two weddings. To the good father's many

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

tender questions Bras Coupé turned a failing eye that gave no answers; until, at length:

'Do you know where you are going?' asked the holy man.
'Yes', answered his eyes, brightening.
'Where?'

He did not reply; he was lost in contemplation, and seemed looking far away.

So the question was repeated.
'Do you know where you are going?'
And again the answer of the eyes. He knew.
'Where?'

The overseer at the edge of the porch, the widow with her babe, and Palmyre and the priest bending over the dying bed, turned an eager ear to catch the answer.

'To—' the voice failed a moment; the departing hero essayed again; again it failed; he tured once more, lifted his hand, and with an ecstatic, upward smile, whispered, 'To—Africa'—and was gone.[5]

But perhaps the most terrible thing in the book is the near-lynching of the negro woman Clemance who is about to be hanged by a group of Grandissimes, is set free by one of them, allowed to run for her life and, as she is rapidly and unsteadily running away, shot so that 'the negress leaped into the air and fell at full length to the ground, stone dead'.

The Grandissimes is a strange, fascinating book. It has on the one hand a hard core of a faithfully and scrupulously rendered social reality, on the other hand it has elements which are highly romantic, even melodramatic: feuds, duels, killings, violence, masked balls, mystery, magic, love; and of course there is the richly powerful language. So that one is tempted to reflect with the late Richard Chase that:

> Whenever it turns out to be a brilliant and memorable book, the American novel of manners will also be a romance; more than likely the observation of manners and the painting of the social scene will be a by-product of the romance that really engages the author's mind.[6]

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

My purpose in presenting this paper has been rather to introduce a comparatively unknown but very powerful book. I have therefore not found it proper to analyse the novel in great detail nor to interpret its light and dark symbolism. Chase for one feels that this symbolism is used with equal effectiveness in American fiction perhaps only in *Light in August* and in Melville's *Benito Cereno*.

REFERENCES

1. Cable, George W., *The Grandissimes*, p. 81 Sagamore Press, American Century Series, 1957. My references are to this edition of the novel.
2. *Ibid.* p. 32.
3. *Ibid.* p. 156.
4. *Ibid.* p. 191.
5. *Ibid.* p. 193.
6. Chase, Richard, *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, p. 160 (Doubleday Anchor).

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

'THE SCARLET LETTER' WITHOUT ALLEGORY

V. K. CHARI

YVOR WINTERS, in his essay on Hawthorne in *Maule's Curse* calls *The Scarlet Letter* a pure allegory. Hawthorne was essentially an allegorist; had he followed the advice of Poe and other well-wishers and thrown his allegorizing out the window, it is certain nothing essential to his genius would have remained. That Hawthorne was essentially an allegorist is perhaps unquestionable. But it may be shown, at least as regards *The Scarlet Letter*, that if you threw the allegorizing out the window what would still certainly remain is not merely a narrative that is intensely moving, but also a work of art that is complete within its own frame, without any reference to an external set of facts or ideas. When all is said about Hawthorne's allegorical disposition and the Puritan tendency to allegory that he inherited, *The Scarlet Letter* remains a great story and a great drama. But Winters thinks it is a great allegory. According to him one should not come to the book expecting to find a novel, for Hawthorne had small gift for the creation of human beings; his figures 'draw their life not from simple familiar human characteristics . . . but from the precision and intensity with which they render their respective ideas'. Hester represents the repentent sinner, Dimmesdale the half-repentent sinner, Pearl the symbolic offspring of sin, and Chillingworth the unrepentent sinner.

But it is also possible to view the figures in the story not as dramatizations of abstract conceptions, but as characters in a drama existing in relation to each other in dynamic balance. And it is possible to view the story itself not as an allegorizing of the general Idea of *Sin*, but as a profound drama of guilt and sorrow. As the result of an initial breach of the moral law committed, four human characters are caught in a dismal maze. Hester and Dimmesdale are partners in the sin. Hester bears her shame publicly, whereas Dimmesdale is a man burdened with a secret, who earnestly desires the unutterable solace of a confession but cannot accomplish it, and hence totters under the burden of crime

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

and anguish. Dimmesdale loathes his miserable self; feels he is utterly a pollution and a lie. But when he does expose himself he experiences a deep catharsis of the spirit and attains supreme satisfaction in death. This guilt psychology of Dimmesdale invites comparison with Roskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. (See Chapter: 'The Minister's Vigil').

Is Roger Chillingworth a diabolical agent, an emissary of Satan? Even if he were he would still be character—not an allegory. Chillingworth, like Iago, is a diabolical character, but unlike Iago, with a perfectly clear human motivation. The desire for revenge has transformed him into a fiend.

The interest of Pearl's character derives from two sources. Firstly, the mother mostly projects her guilt feelings into the child and looks on her as the fruit of her sin. Pearl is the 'scarlet letter' in another form—the scarlet letter endowed with life—both signalizing the ignominy which scorches into Hester's bosom. Once again, Pearl is her retribution—she reminds her of her fall. Secondly, as for the people, they look on Pearl as a demon offspring. But Pearl as a character is psychologically plausible, whatever her allegorical significance may be. There is something wrong with her nature; she has been born amiss. She has inherited her mother's lawless passion.

Hawthorne fully invests the 'scarlet letter' with a poignant emotional and symbolical meaning. The letter's significance derives from the inner anguish of its wearers, Hester as well as Dimmesdale, of which it stands as a symbol. Besides, it is a public stigma. The 'scarlet letter' as a symbol performs a dramatic function like the 'damned spot' in *Macbeth*.

There are a number of dramatic confrontations in the novel—powerful scenes, each one of which is like a monument—'The Interview', 'The Leech and His Patient', 'The Minister's Vigil', 'Hester and the Physician', 'The Pastor and His Parishoner', 'The Child at the Brook-side', and finally the great climax of revelation.

The strength of the novel flows from the dramatic quality of the narrative itself, its character interactions and confrontations, and above all from its powerful psychological study of the operations of the guilty mind. The character pulsate with human feeling and the story has dramatic intensity and movement.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

I am not trying to suggest that allegory is bad; it has its value as a literary device, and may add a new dimension to the meaning of a work. But many levels of meaning do not guarantee a work's goodness, as one simple meaning well-said may not be a sign of its poverty. It would, of course, be perfectly legitimate to look for allegory in a work provided its author has 'intended' it. But, in the case of *The Scarlet Letter* it is nowhere clear in the work itself that its author has intended it to be an allegory. And we have no recorded statement from him regarding any such intention. Nevertheless to characterize the novel as a 'pure allegory' may accord with Hawthorne's habitual mode of writing; but it seems to me to impoverish the dramatic interest and the depth and intensity of characterization that the story achieves with such consummate skill.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

HAWTHORNE'S CRITICISM OF THE PURITAN SOCIETY IN 'THE SCARLET LETTER'

O. P. GREWAL

MOST of us read *The Scarlet Letter* as a story of guilt and sorrow, of a few individuals with 'tainted souls', without reference to the society of which they formed a part. Hawthorne, we take it, was almost indifferent to the larger social reality, and his chief interest for us lies in his deep understanding of individual psychology. But Hawthorne does show a sharp awareness of the forces that shape and mould society. It is to get at the moral essence of his contemporary society that he goes to its roots in the past of the early Puritan settlement when it was given a definitive shape. He is concerned with the past not to escape the tensions of the contemporary American Society, but because he is, in Q. D. Leavis's words, 'a critic and interpreter of American cultural history', a 'sociological novelist' concerned with the evolution of American society. Probably it would be better if we looked at *The Scarlet Letter* from this sociological angle and say that Hawthorne is giving us a critical estimate, from the point of view of his own age, of the values of the Puritan society because these values were behind most of the tensions of the new England Society of his own times. The depiction of the psychology of the various characters is subservient to this main concern and it would be best understood by relating it to the society whose foundations those Puritans had laid. We should not forget that we get a picture of the society first and the individuals appear on the scene after that.

Hawthorne does not repudiate the values of the Puritan Society, he only finds them inadequate. He tells us in the 'Custom House' that he was haunted by 'the grave, bearded, sable cloaked and steeple crowned figure of his first progenitor' and that he shared many traits of these 'stern and black-browed puritans'. He felt within him the compulsive power of their ethics and he accepted their moral law, their sense of overwhelming presence of evil in this world and their sense of doom for the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

sinners. But he was also far enough removed from them to see the limitations and excesses of their ethics. His gift of irony and his openness to the non-Christian romantic values according to which there is something sacred, rich and valuable in all human relationships, especially man-woman relationship, even if they are in opposition to the canons of society, helped him in offering a searching critique of Puritan values.

The Puritan town is depicted in contrast with the wild heathen Nature of the dark and inscrutable forest 'never subjugated by human law nor illuminated by higher truth' where the Indian roams freely and also with the lawless world of the Spanish desperadoes on the seas. There is no higher law than the natural human instincts in both these territories. On the skirts of the forest near the seashore, the Puritans establish a society which is characterised by order, dignity, security and ethical rigour. It is a godly New England where religion and law are identified. Hawthorne says that this community 'owned its origins and progress not to the impulses of youth but to the stern and tempered energies of manhood and the sombre sagacity of age'. Its eminent characters 'were men of long tried integrity, solid wisdom and sad-coloured experience—endowments of that grave and weighty order which gives the idea of permanence'. All forms of authority here 'possessed the sacredness of divine institutions'. The scaffold scene in the beginning and the procession scene towards the end are awe-inspiring and majestic. Thus, an image of a stable society of sober, honest and mature people is created. But there are suggestions of heaviness, rigidity and common-placeness also. Hawthorne says that 'these people had accomplished so much because they had imagined and hoped so little'. They lacked that fine sense of discrimination and intelligence which can disentangle the mesh of good and evil. He says that the Puritan Governors—Bradsheet, Endicott, Dudley, Bellinghan—'were distinguished by ponderous sobriety rather than activity of intellect'. He also suggests that they lacked in refinement and delicacy. They did not include in their set-up 'the delicate harvest of fancy and sensibility'. In rejecting the world of the forest—a world of sensuous pleasure and free-play of human instincts as a haunt of the Black Man, they rejected something valuable. The impulsive, the youthful, the sensuous, the magical, in short all that man has in common with the world of the forest and also the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

imaginative and the artistic, were summarily rejected by them and hence it led to an impoverishment of life.

Hester's story brings out their narrowness and their ruthlessness towards those who transgressed the law and also their inability to sift good from evil when they are found together. It shows how the ethical rigour of these Puritans tended to close their hearts, as a group, against human love and sympathy. Hester is a beautiful, passionate woman full of sensuous warmth and she has artistic talents. But the richness of her personality has to succumb to the rigours of the moral law. The 'fertility and gorgeousness of her fancy' shown in her needle work, the voluptuous, oriental charm of her personality, the light and graceful foliage of her character had all been withered up by the red-hot brand of Puritan punishment and she becomes a woman cold as marble. She is alienated from society. Her life becomes a dreary desert. That this devastation of Hester's life and her ignominy are not fully endorsed by Hawthorne, is made evident to us in many ways. Hawthorne reminds us that her figure on the scaffold, with the child in her arms, might have made a Papist think of Divine Maternity. All is not right with a society where there is such a bitter contrast to 'the sacred image of sinless motherhood', where there is a 'taint of deepest sin the most sacred quality of human life'. Something has gone wrong if the 'world is only the darker for this woman's beauty and the more lost for the infant she had borne'. There is a suggestion that in their callousness towards Hester, however sinful she might be, the Puritans are being callous to a sacred principle—that of Motherhood. Through the beauty of the forest scene where Hester and Dimmesdale meet and where Hester removes her cap and lets her dark luxuriant hair fall down after she has thrown away the scarlet letter, we are made to feel what a wealth of experience is wasted in Hester. Hawthorne treats Hester very sympathetically. Her sense of self-respect, her dignity, her courage, her generosity and her self-effacing affection for her daughter are again and again emphasized. We are also made to feel that there is something noble in her resolve not to reveal the identity of her lover and to suffer the ignominy all by herself. Then, there is the product of the transgression of the moral law, i.e., Pearl. Pearl has angelic beauty. She is vivacious. She is compared to a bird, a sprite, a mermaid and a fairy. Sunlight, colours and flowers are associated with her.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

She is akin to the sensuously rich world of the forest. Hawthorne suggests that Pearl should be accommodated and humanized, not rejected. Otherwise life is dull and gloomy. The Scaffold and the prison—'that black flower of civilization', are the most prominent images of Puritan society; the 'grim and grisly beadle' representing 'the whole dismal severity of Puritan code of Law' is a poor creature as compared to the resplendent figure of Hester as she emerges from the prison.

This severity of the Puritan society is not only wasteful, it is also ineffectual in that it does not bring about any change in the hearts of the sinners. The harsh discipline of the scarlet letter, on the whole, failed to make Hester conform to the code. She developed a freedom of mind which made her doubt the very foundations of all Puritan institutions and a lack of faith in the purity of the pure, parallel to Goodman Brown's, though outwardly she conducts herself as a Sister of Mercy. Hawthorne suggests that this iron code must be softened and broadened. It must take into account the frailty of ordinary human beings. It must have a 'golden thread'; Phoebe in 'The House of the Seven Gables' represents this more humane and modest kind of Puritanism.

Through what happens to Dimmesdale, Hawthorne provides criticism of the Puritan code from another angle. The Puritan society had too ambitious spiritual aspirations. Their steeple crowned hats were a visible symbol of their high spiritual aspirations. This led to tension and hypocrisy. Arthur Dimmesdale is a pure, sensitivie spirit with a lofty brow. His voice has a deep Apostolic resonance. He aspires to climb the 'high mountain peaks of faith and sanctity'. And yet this reverend minister, the idol of the Puritan society, the elect and sanctified soul (if ever there was one) falls, though he aspired never to have any traffic with the flesh and then he hides his guilt because of his excessive concern with appearing 'as white as snow' and because of his very human cowardice. Human nature, even at its most ethereal, cannot bear very much of spirituality. Then he tortures and wastes himself away. The sense of guilt gnaws on his being and he spends sleepless nights and yet because of his Puritanical pride he cannot acknowledge Hester and Pearl, that is, his associations with the carnal. He is ashamed of his passionate moments. Hawthorne does not suggest that the Puritan society was more spiritual than any other, but that the New England Puritan Society

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

did have greater spiritual pretensions and they were always apologetic and uneasy about the pleasures of life they, perforce, allowed themselves. The result was a hypocritical life full of continuous self-torture. This hypocrisy and uneasiness of the Puritans about secular comforts is clear from what Hawthorne says about Governor Bellingham: 'The impression made by the aspect of Governor Bellingham, so rigid and severe and frost-bitten with more than autumnal age, was hardly in keeping with the appliances of worldly enjoyments where-with he had evidently done his utmost to surround himself'. John Wilson, the clergyman, had a legitimate taste for all the good and comfortable things of life because he still carried with him some of the old tastes of Elizabethan England, but he was ashamed of this weakness. The Puritans had exaggerated even their ordinary human weaknesses into the image of a terrible Devil with whom they were in perpetual combat. Their own nature gets twisted, deformed, and becomes diabolical as a result of their excessive ethical concern and recoils upon them and destroys them. Chillingworth, in himself a melodramatic figure, can be seen as a projection of the lower, non-spiritual aspect of the minister's personality that takes revenge upon him because of the wrong that this angelic figure did it, by falling for Hester, and yet not acknowledging her. The moment Hester and Pearl are accepted, and instead of false spiritual pride there is basic humility and kinship with ordinary and sinful human nature, Chillingworth shrivels into nothing. This world is diabolical largely because the Puritans do not come to terms with even their ordinary foibles. Be true to human nature, let there be a harmonious play of all the human faculties according to their importance within the framework of Christian moral law—that seems to be Hawthorne's comment on the spiritual ambitiousness of the Puritan society.

Hawthorne accepts the Puritan ethics but he wants to temper it with the more liberal spirit of Christian humanism. He does not concern himself with the Calvinistic theology from which this ethic derives and which gives it the stamp of fanaticism. Whether a separation of Puritan ethics from Calvinistic theology and a consequent liberalization is possible or not, Hawthorne has not indicated. As a novelist he has examined the Puritan ethics only as it affected the life of the individuals who lived in the Puritan Society.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

THE ORIENT IN WHITMAN'S 'PASSAGE TO INDIA'

THAKUR GURU PRASAD

THE Orient in Whitman's 'Passage to India' (1868, 1871) refers to the rather limited area of the Indian subcontinent; though, by a process of deliberate mystification very like that of the British writer Charles Lamb, he attempts a trick on his reader, and overtly defines it as consisting of 'Asia's and Africa's fables'.[1] Besides mentioning the legend of Adam and Eve, one of very minor significance to the poem, there is no other pointer to this avowed wider framework.

The poem, however, is a sincere, deep, and genuinely ardent homage to the profound wisdom of ancient Hindu philosophy. To those who have either inherited the spiritual meaning of the *Upanisads*, or have imbibed it with real perception, this poem reveals that the sensitive and noble mind of the great American poet has not only devotedly abandoned itself to bathe in the light of 'the deep diving bibles and legends'[2] of the East, but also that the poet has done it after thorough contemplation, and with full, confident knowledge of which is which; for throughout the poem[3] the poet's imaginative mind keeps weighing the material, scientific accomplishments of the present against the spiritual intuition of the 'myths Asiatic, the primitive fables',[4] and finds the latter irresistibly superior.

The starting point of the poem is the characteristic mood of Whitman of celebrating a unique moment, of singing a new worship. This time the hymn is in honour of 'the marriage of continents, climates, and oceans'[5] occasioned by the linking, through the marvels of modern science, namely, the Suez Canal, the Trans-Atlantic cables, and the Pacific Railroad, of Europe to Asia and Africa on the one hand, and to the New World on the other. Great accomplishment of the Present indeed! But the poet loses no time in making clear his purpose: He was singing the new worship

not for trade or transportation only.
But in God's name, and for thy sake O Soul.[6]

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Clearly, these lines bespeak disenchantment. Whitman has realized the ultimate inadequacy of trade and transportation only through first-hand experience of the values of what was to become famous as the 'Gilded Age', of Jacksonion democracy and of the patriotism of political Democrats. He has seen his great opportunity in this symbolic marriage of continents, to escape from the limitations of Time and Space, and visualise 'the infinite greatness of the past',[7] 'the dark unfathomed retrospect'.[8] Convinced of the great usefulness of such a communion with the wisdom of centuries, he advises his soul a passage to India.

The passage as undertaken in this poem quite characteristically illustrates Whitman's transcendental approach. The poet's quest of the Ind soon passes beyond the physical dimensions. The terrestrial counterpart of the mainly celestial or spiritual journey to what he calls the 'dark, unfathomed past' is very much there, presently inspiring the poet's muse. It occupies the whole of the 4th section of the poem. Again, quite significantly, Whitman gratefully acknowledges the momentous outcome of the desire for a physical passage to India, running like a rivulet along all history.[9] It has caused the birth of nations—America itself, for that matter, for 'purpose vast',[10]—as also the accomplishment of what the poet denotes by a beautiful image—'the rondure'[11] of the world. But it soon becomes clear that the journey haunting the poet's imagination is really a spiritual journey to the past stories of Indian thought contained in the 'flowing literatures, tremendous epics',[12] and 'the myths and fables of the old'.[13] The passionate, yet accurate way he describes them, proves not only his enthusiasm for spiritual and moral values, but also his correct and thorough understanding of the meaning and mettle of the *Upanisads*. This is how the poet addresses them:

> O you temples fairer than lilies pour'd over by the rising sun!
> O you fables spurning the known, eluding the hold of the known, mounting to heaven!
> You lofty and dazzling towers, pinnacled, red as roses, burnish'd with gold!
> Towers of fables immortal fashion'd from mortal dreams![14]

Overwhelmed by the magnetism of these 'realms of budding bibles',[15] the poet transcends the course of his journey to the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

'primal thought'[16] contained in these fables and myths. As he for the first time 'scanned' the 'Vast Rondure' from the angle of the *Upanisads*, he feels intimations of 'some hidden prophetic intention'.[17] Whitman is simply echoing the inquisitive, sad refrain of the *Brāhmanas* of *Svetasvatār Upanisad* in his imaginative vision of the 'wandering, yearning, curious',[18] restlessly exploring, 'never-happy hearts' of the 'myriad progeny' of Adam and Eve.[19] The questionings as well as the solution take on the pattern of what is popularly called the philosophy of the *Vedānta*.[20] For Whitman the solution comes in the form of intuitive hope of the advent of 'the true son of God, the poet',[21] at which the 'sad strain' will be eliminated by compacting the 'trinitas divine',[22] so that 'Nature and Man shall be disjoin'd and diffused no more'.[23]

The optimism exalts the mood of the poet, and his imagination, borne on silent thoughts of 'Time and Space and Death',[24] envisages a communion with God,[25] where the soul transcends Space, mates with Time, and smiles at Death[26]. The idea of such a communion, as well as of the Deity is strikingly similar to that of the Vedic *Granthas*.[27]

The dream of the communion of the soul with the 'Light of Light',[28] gives rise to an ecstasy, in which it dawns upon the poet's mind that the journey leading to such a sublime moment is passage to more than India[29]; it takes one to the core of the secret of the mystery of all existence[30]. Inspired deeply by this realization, the poet is roused into an impatient demand—'Passage, immediate passage!'[31],—and in the blessed company of his soul, immediately sets sail[32].

This account of an almost entirely metaphysical voyage applies a powerful focus on certain aspects of some fundamental articles of Whitman's poetic faith. For one thing, the influence of Indian philosophy has some remarkable relevance to his missionary idea of the poet and his function[33]. Again, the idea of the soul as the constant companion of the individual in the quest of Reality is deeply rooted in the wisdom of the ancient Indian seers[34]. But above all, the concept in Whitman of the Trinity of the Person, the Soul, and God is more akin, to my mind, to the Vedantic concept of the Trinity of the *Jeeva*, the *ātman*, and the *paramātman*, than to any other system. Whitman's belief in the ultimate fulfilment in the fusion of the three, also echoes the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

verdict of the *Vedānta*.[35] Besides, Whitman's very very controversial concept of the perfect comrade, especially manifested in the ideal of brotherly affection, which struck as something jarring on the contemporary American readers, is but a fraction of the doctrine of absolute devotion as conceived by the Indian mind[36]. Lastly, the ostentatious concentration on 'thought' reflects the stress on it placed by the *Upanisads* as the sole means of purifying the soul, thus setting it on to the quest of the ultimate reality.[37]

This, to be sure, is an impressive list of direct influences of the *Upanisads* on Whitman's thought. In the absence of convincing evidence of a direct contact between Whitman and the Vedic *Granthas*, the factual realization of such affinity gives a shock of surprise. At the same time it points to the inadequacy of the available information on sources of formative influences on the genius of Whitman.

REFERENCES

1. 'Passage to India', 2, ii, 3.
2. *Ibid.*, 5.
3. See *Ibid.*, 1, i and ii; and 2, i and ii; and 6, i, 1-8.
4. *Ibid.*, 2, i, 2.
5. *Ibid.*, 6, i, 3.
6. *Ibid.*, 2, iv, 4-5.
7. *Ibid.*, 1, ii, 3.
8. *Ibid.*, 1, ii, 1.
9. *Ibid.*, 4, ii, 1-2.
10. *Ibid.*, ii, 8.
11. *Ibid.*, 9.
12. *Ibid.*, 6, iii, 8.
13. *Ibid.*, 2, ii, 3.
14. *Ibid.*, 2, ii, 7-10.
15. *Ibid.*, 7, i, 4.
16. *Ibid.*, 1.
17. See *ibid.*, 5, i, 1-7.
18. *Ibid.*, ii, 2-4.
19. cf., 'Passage to India'.

Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad progeny after them.
Wandering, yearning, curious, with restless explorations.
With questionings, baffled, formless, feverish, with never-happy hearts.
With that sad incessant refrain, *wherefore unsatisfied soul? Whither O mocking life?*

* * *

What is this earth to our affections? (unloving earth, without a throb to answer ours,

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Cold earth, the place of graves).

and *Svetasvatār Upanisad*, (I, i), quoted Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanisads*, Oxford U.P., 1921, p. 1, where the *Brāhmanas* pose the basic question as follows:

'What is the cause? Brahma? *Whence are we born*?
Whereby do we live? *And on what are we established*?
Overruled by whom, in pains and pleasures,
Do we live our various conditions, O ye theologians?'

20. The solution consists of knowledge of the soul, as remarked in the instruction of Nārada by Sanat Kumar in *Chandogya Upanisad*, 7, 2, 3. (Hume, *op. cit.*, 251): 'He who knows the soul (Ātman) crosses over sorrow'. Whitman has accepted the view to my mind with a vengeance, as is proved by his open blunt declaration in 'Passage to India' (8, ii. 1-3):

With laugh and many a kiss,
(Let others deprecate, let others weep for sin, remorse, humiliation,)
O soul thou pleasest me, I thee.

21. 'Passage to India', 5, v, 5.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, 1, 9.
24. *Ibid.*, 8, iv, p. 3.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 6-7.
26. *Ibid.*, vi, p. 1-6.
27. As for the concept of the Deity, cf., 'Passage to India', 8, v, 1-12

O thou transcendent,
Nameless, the fibre of the breath,
Light of light, shedding forth universes, thou centre of them,
Thou mightier centre of the true, the good, the loving,
Thou moral spiritual fountain—

* * * *

Thou pulse, thou motive of the stars, suns, systems,
That circling, move in order, safe harmonious,
Athwart the shapeless vastness of space,

and some of the passages in the *Upanisads*, where the nature and attributes of the *Brahman* are described. For instance, in *Brihadāranyak Upanisad* there are two episodes to illustrate the 'nameless' attribute of the *Brahman*. In canto 2, section 1, consisting of the dialogue between Gārgya and Ajātasátru, the latter describes the *Brahman* (to be accurate, the Person who is used as a synonym for *Brahman*) as nameless, for it transcends all attributes devoted by divers names. Again, in canto 4, section 1, Yājñavalkya instructs King Janaka on the nature of Brahman on the same lines, giving six definitions of *Brahman* and calling them all partial, finally declaring that the Person is endless. (Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 129).

Again, *Brahman* is described as the 'breath of life' in *Brihadāranyak Upanisad* (4, 1, 3), while Whitman calls his God the 'fibre of breath' in the passage quoted above.

Another striking thing is the close affinity between the last three lines of the passage quoted from Whitman and the following verses of the *Brihadaranyak Upanisad* (3, 9, 13).

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Verily, O Gargi, at the command of that Imperishable the moments, the hours, the days, the nights, the fortnights, the months, the seasons and the years stand apart (Hume *op. cit.*, p. 119) just as the procreation image used by Whitman is more copiously expressed in the following verse of the *Mundaka Upanisad*:

From Him proceeds fire, whose fuel is the Sun;
From Him the moon (soma), rain; herbs on the earth.
The male pours seed in the female.
Many creatures are produced from the Person.
(*Mundaka*, 2, 1, 5. Hume, *op. cit.*, 370)

and is further expanded in verses 7, 8, and 9 of the same. (See pp. 370-71 of Hume, *op. cit.*)

28. 'Passage to India', 8, v, 3.

29. *Ibid.*, 9, i, 1.

30. *Ibid.*, ii, 1-9.

31. *Ibid.*, iii, 1.

32. *Ibid.*, iv, 1-4.

33. The noble concept of the poet as the discipliner of tradition, the seer of Reality, and the remover of sorrow is typical of ancient Indian philosophy. Where Whitman, in the height of his highly idealistic notion of the poet, is content merely to call him the 'true son of God', the *Bhagavadgita* equates the poet with God himself. This is how the ideal poet is described:

The poet (who) disciplines the past tradition, maintains in memory the minutest of things, transcends all known norms of description, is the opposite of darkness and shines like the sun. (*Bhagavadgita* 8, 9.)

Now, Whitman's ideal of the poet, peculiarly formed by such varied elements as American chauvinism and democracy and Carlyle's idea of the poet as a hero, was by no chance the outgrowth of the sole Vedic influence. But, at any rate, the Vedic influence seems to have chastened it a good deal, and exalted it above the narrow, materialistic imperialism of the misguided concept of the white man's burden.

34. This typically individualistic ideal is at the back of the whole of the doctrine of *Sadhana*, made so much of by the Vedantic philosophy. Dr Radhakrishnan points out in *Indian Philosophy*, (1927, George Allen and Unwin, London): ('In the *Upanisads* we return to explore the depths of the inner world: . . . The soul of the man is the keyhole to the landscape of the whole universe'. (Vol. I, p. 145 of the 1948 reprint ed).

35. Cf. the *Visistādvaita* of Ramanuja.

36. The absolute dependence on God, which is at the back of such a transcendental attitude, is very aptly captured in the following prayer:

Thou art Father, thou art Mother, thou art Brother, thou art Learning, thou art Wealth; O God of Gods, thou art Everything.

37. As the *Mundaka Upanisad* (3, 1, 9, Hume *op. cit.*, p. 375) puts it:

That subtile Soul is to be known by thought.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

THE LOVE POETRY OF EMILY DICKINSON

SALAMATULLAH KHAN

EMILY Dickinson wrote more than a hundred poems on love. An overwhelming majority of them were written during the years 1861-1963. With the passage of time the stream of her inspiration seems to have dwindled into an insignificant trickle and except for one poem written in 1876, she altogether banished love from her poetry after 1866. This fact is significant in itself; it is more so for those critics who believe that the poet is the poetry and that the experience of the poet is the fountain-head of all his creative writing. There is also the modern prejudice that virgins, unless they had the requisite experience, know too little to write poetry, particularly love poetry which, by its very nature, emotional, subjective and private. Emily Dickinson was *A* Victorian in a puritan New England and in matters of love, without the freedom we have taken for granted in our day; she was also a virgin. The virgins of her generation, with their pinched and pale faces, had known only severe self-denial and repression. Except for the years of adolescence, she lived in austere seclusion, declining in later years to meet even intimate friends. These startling facts about her lead us to the inevitable question: where did she get the experience to write these love poems?

This question stares the reader in the face and many biographers in their efforts to find a convincing answer have made the life of Emily Dickinson an unconvincing mystery and an unresolved controversy. There is some justice in Professor Allen Tate's complaint that scholars have felt only biographical curiosity about her. In a survey course at Harvard I heard an amazing theory being propounded with considerable gusto that Emily Dickinson suffered, inadvertently perhaps, from father fixation and that explained her love for men much older than herself—one of them being her father's friend—with whom marriage was an impossibility. I do not know if such wild speculations have been made in print in the United States. To the best of my knowledge no great harm has been done by the Freudian critic so far but who knows some day he may pounce upon and mangle a

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

precious life. All this by the way for our interest is in the poetry, not the poet.

Emily was aware of her talent as a poet and she gathered her forces for writing poetry with single-minded devotion. It was a conscious and deliberate choice and any sympathy for her life-long solitude would be misplaced. If she was lonely, it was a loneliness she shared with all great artists of the world.

Commenting on this aspect of her life, Professor Allen Tate has observed: 'When she went upstairs and closed the door, she mastered life by rejecting it. Others in their way had done it before; still others did it later..... Mastery of the world by rejecting the world was the doctrine, even if it was not always the practice of Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather. It is the meaning of fate in Hawthorne; his people are fated to withdraw from the world and to be destroyed. And it is one of the great themes of Henry James'.

This is a very significant statement as it reveals one of the paradoxes of Emily Dickinson's life. One may add further that she rejected the belief of the transcendentalists in the divine nature of intuition and also the doctrine that man was the source of moral law. But like Emerson and Thoreau she believed in the self-reliance of the individual to improve his nature through his own efforts. She also refused to accept the orthodoxies preached by Jonathan Edwards but saw like him that through suffering and toil one must achieve his cherished ideal:

> Each—it's difficult Ideal
> Must achieve—Itself—
> Through the solitary prowess
> Of a Silent life.

Again she believed as an artist that her response to experience could best be realised in the rarefied private world of her own where human encounters did not blunt the edge of her sensitive soul:

> The Soul's Superior instants
> Occur to Her—alone—
> When friend—and Earth's occasion
> Have infinite withdrawn—

This may not be good poetry but she states her case very clearly. 'The soul selects her own society', she observed in one of her

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

famous love poems, 'then shuts the door'. In another poem she repeats the idea:

> The Soul that hath a Guest
> Doth seldom go abroad—
> Diviner Crowd at Home—
> Obliterate the need—

To a life of humdrum routine, she preferred the life in the world of her imagination where she could live with greater fullness and intensity than was otherwise possible.

Professor Allen Tate has denied the influence of Emily Dickinson's love for Wadsworth on her poetry and writes: 'It is dangerous to assume that her "life" which to the biographer means the thwarted love affair she is supposed to have had, gave to her poetry a decisive direction. It is even more dangerous to suppose that it made her a poet'.

But there is unmistakable evidence to prove that her love for Wadsworth deepened her sympathy and stimulated her creative activity. No doubt love affairs do not make poets and, as Professor Tate observes, it would be wrong to believe that she would have not been a poet without this experience. She was a poet before she fell in love but considering the amazingly large number of poems she composed after 1860, one cannot fail to notice the sudden blossoming of her genius as a poet. Besides, all her best love poems belong to this period. Even in poems where the personal merges into the universal, the blurred identity of her hopeless love unfailingly remains. We do not know of any other event which might have given impetus to her creative energy, for her life was singularly uneventful. The only other possible explanation could be that by this time she had gained confidence as an artist but it does not explain why her newly gained artistic maturity failed to maintain a steady output over the years to come. It may be a strange coincidence but her creative impulse came to her as a tide and receded soon after the crisis in the affairs of her heart had subsided to a life-long yearning.

I do not know if 'thwarted' is the word to describe her first experience of love. Any girl in her place would have known that her love was hopeless from the very start. To fall in love with a married man is one thing; to cherish a love which is not even mutual is altogether a different matter. The desire to love and

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

to be loved is universal enough but to love without the desire to be loved is a situation which the western mind is not likely to understand readily. It may appear enigmatic and if Freudian theories are pressed into service for explanation, it may appear neurotic. Neurosis in psycho-analytical terminology is a convenient handle to explain every thing which does not conform to the conventional pattern. But such love is known to have existed in the Orient and has found expression in our literatures of the vernacular. Perhaps Emily Dickinson herself never sought fulfilment of her love. In one of her poems she speaks characteristically of 'sights ineffable disgrace' which stains 'adoration'. In another poem she observes:

> I'd rather recollect a setting
> Than own a rising sun ...

She wrote to Higginson in the same mood when she said: 'To escape enchantment, one must always flee', and again, 'Emblem is immeasurable—that is why it is better than fulfilment, which can be drained'. It is interesting to repeat a sentence which Professor Johnson has quoted from Ellen Glasgow's autobiography in this context: 'It is the law of women's nature that the memory of longing survives the more fugitive memory of fulfilment'. In the light of these statements one cannot but conclude that Emily Dickinson consciously endeavoured to preserve the freshness of her dream rather than see the reality. What she needed in life was a preceptor and a muse whom she could adore with physical passion in her imagination. Viewed otherwise her love poems lose their abiding significance.

II

The first, which is also incidentally the largest group of her love poems, is dedicatory and repeatedly expresses her devotion and loyalty to her lover to make assurance, as it were, doubly sure. These declarations of love were not meant to be communicated to the object of her love; they occur in their varying degrees for her own relief and satisfaction. Her ability to observe accurately was not confined to the world outside herself; her remote and solitary existence also enabled her to analyse emotion and to observe the complex shades of her own thought and feeling.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

This explains her detachment which she conspicuously maintains even when she is writing about her purely subjective experience. In one of her letters she described the upheaval of a change of residence:

> 'I took at the time a memorandum of my several senses, and also of my hat and coat, and my best shoes—but it was lost in the melee, and I am out with lanterns looking for myself'.

Even when we think that the turn of phrase in this sentence is rather fanciful, it expresses an attitude of the poet. Her gift to transcend the circumscribed self and take stock of herself as if she were some other person, makes her love poems effectively convincing and saves them from degenerating into sentimental effusions. In one of her early poems she adopts the impersonal third person to describe what apparently is her own nervous confusion at meeting her lover face to face: 'The Rose did caper on her cheek—Her Boddice rose and fell—'. Her speech staggers like drunken men and her fingers fumble at her needle work. Such intensity of emotion is the prerogative of a pure heart at its first encounter with love; it is not that the emotion is in excess of the situation. In another poem she cherishes the hope of her complete identification with her lover and in all humility, necessary to deep love, makes note of the fact that she would be 'the smaller of the two', and like the self-sacrificing bride of the Orient she says with infinite tenderness:

> Forever of His fate to taste—
> If grief—the largest part—
> If joy—to put my piece away
> For that beloved Heart

Again she repeats the idea in another poem that she would give her life and all that is precious to her 'to see his face' and then jokingly asks:

> Now—have I bought it—
> 'Shylock'? Say!
> Sign me the bond

The wit in the unexpected comparison of 'The beloved Heart' to Shylock is a characteristic which we associate with metaphysical poets and of that we shall speak later.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

She never tires of expressing her love and explores in minute details the various aspects of her love. Her diction changes and keeps pace with the variation of her mood. His Love envelops her life and as a dedicated soul she must decline the invitations from others as they come. God would be content with a fraction of the life she poured to him and she 'ceded all of Dust I knew.' As the drop of water loses its identity (locality) in the sea, she would lose her in him. She would carry his face with her when she goes 'out of time'. Walls would be no barrier to her and even if the 'universe' was one solid rock, she would 'tunnel' at 'his silver call' for the recompense to look 'in his eyes'. As the moon leads the sea like a docile boy, she wishes to be guided by 'the Amber Hand'. She loved him as well as Jesus loved men. His love came to her like fire and made 'her house' glow in its radiant light; it was like the sunrise, with the sky

> Impanelled from no summer brief—
> With limit of Decay—
> 'Twas Noon—without the News of Night—
> Nay, Nature, it was Day

Then in a moment of intense longing she says that she would be contented if, like a stranger in 'an ungracious' country, he paused at her door for a short while and if she was permitted to be the housewife in the cottage he lived.

These are the ever-changing shades of her devoted love as she writes about it. Perhaps these poems would have been different if they had been written to make her love known. The fact that they were like an unposted love letter committed to the unknown hands of posterity, gave her freedom to dwell with loving care, sometimes in unfinished and partially realised poems, on the myriad facts of her love. It was unimportant to remember the man who was the occasion of these poems; it would matter little if he did not exist at all, for these poems of sorrow continue one of the poignant themes of English and American poetry—unrequited love.

The first poem of this group was written in 1862 after Wadsworth had left for San Francisco. Emily Dickinson thought that Nature would be different after the crisis and sympathise with the 'Queen of Calvary' as she called herself. But everything was as usual except herself who alone felt the loss. She had hoped that

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

the robin, the daffodils, the grass and the bees would not come with the summer but

> They're here, though; not a creatured failed—
> No Blossom stayed away
> In gentle deference to me—
> The Queen of Calvary

In her despair she asks the rose not to scatter its colour and sweetness as she has lost the capacity to enjoy them. She grieves at the prospect and wonders what she would do when the roses blossom and birds fly in the maple tree, or,

> Oh, when the squirrel fills His Pockets
> And the Berries stare
> How can I bear their jocund Faces
> Thou from Here, so far?

She did not know nor would anybody in her position would have known the answer.

After being disappointed by the indifference of Nature to her suffering, she turns to analyse the blinding grief of separation. She found it so intense that she had to feel her life with both her hands 'to see if it was there.' She had put away his life as an 'ornament too grand' for her but the agonizing possibility haunts her that

> This might have been the Hand
> That sowed the flower, he preferred—
> Or smoothed a homely pain,
> Or pushed the pebble from his path—
> Or played his chosen tune.

Realising that the gulf which separates them cannot be bridged, she envies those who have a physical proximity to him. She envies the sea and the 'spokes of wheels of chariots' on which he rides and those who 'gaze' on his journey. She envies the light that wakes him 'And Bells—that boldly ring/To tell Him it is Noon, abroad' She writes about her unhappiness again and again as in the poem where she laments that 'for Barefoot Vision' he shut her out from his life. She also comments on the permanence of her love; she adjusted her being, carved his name upon it, then exiled herself in the 'East'. She comes to the sad conclusion that bliss

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

in life is a 'fiction' which seems plausible but is not real. To die for him was easier than to live unhappily without him, which includes the 'dying multifold' without the respite granted to the dead. She also states the reason why they must remain apart at least in this life and says that they could suffice for each other but 'hesitating fractions' tore them asunder. Again, the fulfilment of their love was interdict of God and their separation was pre-ordained.

In such a hopeless situation, the only hope that was left to her was that she would achieve after her death what she had failed to accomplish in life. She cautiously mentions the possibility of her achieving 'victory' in one of her poems. She struggles hard to cross the barriers in her path of love and finds her horizon blocked. She promises her feet 'the Grace in sight' but they fail and she wonders if death would prove to be a victory in reverse.

> They strive—and yet delay—
> They perish—Do we die—
> Or is this Death's Experiment—
> Reversed—in Victory?

In the next stage she thinks of the joy she would feel at meeting him after life, which was worse than death, and tells him how she felt without him at midnight when all the clocks of the world had seemed to have stopped, leaving the night colder than it was. She would tell him how she kept the pretence of a smile to show him after they waded through the deep of separation and met after death. Then finally in two of her poems, termed as 'bridal poems', she expresses her conviction that after a long parting, she would meet him 'before the judgment seat of God' where she would be eternally united with him. She muses if any marriage could be like that, with God as the host in paradise and cherubins and seraphins as the 'unobstrusive Guests'. She also thinks of the grave as the little cottage where, like a bridge, she keeps 'the parlor ready', lays 'marble tea' for him and waits to be united in 'everlasting life'.

As she realised that she was not cast for a life of worldly happiness and contentment, her acceptance of the inevitable urged her to write what are known as the poems of renunciation. If renunciation it was, its aim was to give up even the desire of the fulfilment of her love. She was aware of the hopelessness of

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

her love from the very beginning and she always deemed the object of her love farther than the moon or star where he could never reach. She consoles herself with the idea that he exists somewhere in silence to surprise her later but also expresses the fear that 'the play' may prove too costly and death may intervene to deprive her of the 'bliss' of meeting. Finally she accepts her fate, adopting her 'white election'.

> And wear—if God should count me fit—
> Her blameless mystery—

She points out further that sages had called this life of seclusion 'small' but in spite of her initial misgivings, she had found it vast as horizon. As the years went by, she gained self-control and she could hear his name without 'That Stop-sensation—on my soul—/And Thunder—in the Room'. She goes a step farther to assert that she could not live with him because that would be life and

> So we must meet apart—
> You there—I—here
> With just the Door ajar.

As a consequence of this seclusion, she took refuge in the world of her imagination and sought the things which were denied to her in life. This withdrawal into the cloudland of her dreams was the reflex action of her self-denial. She had closed the 'doors' of her soul and jammed the 'valves' of her attention only to escape in a larger world where she had a greater measure of freedom to live her dreams. It was necessary for her to imagine her dreams come true to preserve their freshness and enchantment and also to protect her from becoming morbid. In such a world she lives with him and he presents an invisible claim on her though no wedlock was granted to her. 'I live with Him—I hear His Voice/I stand alive—Today'—. She also believes 'That life like This—is stopless' whatever may be the verdict of others. It is so because she can see him better in the darkness of the intervening years and her lively imagination has dispensed with reality.

> What need of Day—
> To Those whose Dark—hath so—surpassing Sun—
> It deem it be—Continually—
> At the Meridian?

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

She even wishes to 'play Yesterday' and become a girl at school again, though she doubts if it was possible and asks if the lark could go back to the 'shell' after he had soared in the sky, and if he did, would the new imprisonment not hurt him? Finally she hears his voice at her door asking the servant for her and she takes a flower as she goes to meet him, for he had not seen her 'in this life'. They walk and a tender, thoughtful moon goes with them. The meeting is over but she would sacrifice her blood—'purple—in my Vein—to live that hour again.'

Her deep sorrow in love gave her the necessary insight to analyse pain and she wrote two poems to give it poetic utterance. It is a well-known psychological truth that one loses perspective in intense and prolonged suffering. The pangs of grief hurt and are accountable in time only in their newness. Their continuation creates a blank in which the awareness of time is lost. This sophisticated idea is expressed with admirable precision in her poems:

Similarly the nerves are stunned after a tragic crisis and the soul lies in a trance without being able to remember the distinctive features of daily existence. The sufferer moves mechanically as one does in somnambulism and goes through the daily routine of life without living them. This psychological truth finds expression in what I believe to be one of the finest poems of the English language.

After great pain, a formal feeling comes—
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs—
The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore,
And Yesterday, or Centuries before.
The Feet, mechanical, go round—
A Wooden way
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought—
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone—
This is the Hour of Lead—
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow—
First—Chill—then Stupor—then the letting go—

The imagery in this poem is controlled by the central idea expressed in the first line. The stunning effect of grief is suggested

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

by the words 'formal', 'ceremonious', 'tombs', 'stiff', 'mechanical', 'wooden', 'regardless', 'chill', 'stupor' and the 'letting go'. The image of persons frozen to death, who feel the chill, then stupor, then the letting go is a close analogy of the experience of intense suffering. The outer form of the poem which maintains the funeral image in its three stages of death, procession and burial, is shaped by the inner mood of the poem and the use of exact rhyme in the last two lines of each stanza adds to its technical excellence. The heaviness of pain is suggested by the words 'bore', 'quartz', 'stone' and finally 'lead'. The pain described in both these poems is not necessarily one caused by disappointment in love; it is universalised by the use of the abstract noun.

There are also moments when Emily Dickinson forgot the suffering of her heart and wrote in a light mood. She unhesitatingly laughed at herself or made fun of love. This ability to see the comic aspects of an emotion in which she was deeply involved is a sure indication of her genius as a poet. A lesser artist would have never climbed the abysmal depth to be in the sunshine for a while. Such moods do not constitute a negation of the predominance of a sense of deprivation in her love poems; they add to its poignancy and provide a refreshing change. One of her poems begins cheerfully:

Is Bliss then, such Abyss,
I must not put my foot amiss
For fear I spoil my shoe?

Another poem opens with the question:

'Why do I love' You, Sir?

She answers indirectly by saying that the wind does not require the grass to say why 'she' cannot keep her place when 'he' passes and that the lightning does not ask the eye why it shut in 'his' presence. It is a pleasant manner of saying that her love for him was inevitable and needed no interrogation as it was almost elemental. Again in a very amusing poem she declares that she would gladly be anything he desired to win his love. She would be tall as stag or small as wren to suit him and if she was assured of his love, she would not hesitate to transform herself into rhinoceros or even a mouse.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Closely resembling these in mood are the poems in which her attitude is similar to that of the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century England. The love poems of Donne and Marvel are enlivened with wit, by the unexpected turn of phrase or argument or by their startling discovery of the similarity between two or more apparently dissimilar things. The metaphysical conceit, which they used lavishly in their poetry, is distinguished by being far-fetched and witty and gives a precision and pointedness to their utterance. Emily Dickinson did not consciously employ this artifice in her poetry but there are occasional flashes of great beauty. In one of her poems she contrasts the merit of her lover with her own unworthiness and fears that she may prove to be insufficient for him. But in a sudden shift of thought she cleverly argues that a thing high must necessarily recline on something low,

> For nothing higher than Itself
> Itself can rest upon—

Again in a metaphysical conceit she compares her life to a loaded gun:

> My life had stood—a Loaded Gun—
> In Corners—till a Day
> The Owner passed—identified—
> And carried Me away—

The extended metaphor is maintained as she points out that the mountains resound when she speaks for him and when she smiles with her 'Vesuvian face', the valley glows with 'cordial light'. At night she guards him and is a deadly foe to his enemies who cannot stir the second time once she lays on him 'a Yellow Eye' or 'an emphatic Thumb'. The poem ends, however, on a different note and amuses by the sudden shift of thought:

> For I have but the power to kill
> Without—the power to die—

In a similar poem she begins rather grandly that his 'moon' fills or diminishes at her command and at her bidding it shines in the sky or hides behind the clouds. But, she observes in the concluding lines, as they hold a 'Mutual Disc' and face a 'Mutual Day',

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Which is the Despot, neither knows—
Nor Whose—the Tyranny—

In two of her poems, Emily Dickinson employed sexual imagery with amazing candour and in complete disregard of the taboo on such subjects in her day. About one of them Colonel Higginson, at the time he and Mrs Todd were making selections for the *Poems 1891*, wrote: 'One poem only I dread a little to print —that wonderful *Wild Nights*—lest the malignant read into it more than that virgin recluse ever dreamed of putting there. Has Miss Lavinia any shrinking about it? You will understand and pardon my solicitude. Yet what a loss to omit it! Indeed it is not to be omitted'.

The argument of the poem is that a stormy night would become a luxury if she were with him, for 'a heart in port' has no need of sailor's compass or chart and the howling winds outside can do no harm. The poem ends suggestively:

Rowing in Eden—
Ah, the Sea!
Might I but moor—Tonight—
In Thee!

The second poem describes the experience of the previous night when someone tried 'to twine' thinking her tired or lonely but she turned 'ducal'; for a small boat ('brig') one port was sufficient. The poem concludes with the lines:

Our's be the tossing—wild though the sea—
Rather than a Mooring—unshared by thee.
Our's be the Cargo—unladen—here—
Rather than the 'spicy isles'
And thou—not there—

Commenting on the second poem, Professor Johnson writes: 'The slow regularity of the beginning is speeded up at the end of the second stanza. The third stanza opens with a panting dactyl that slows to a quiet measure, shortened, in the last line, to two feet. The imagery throughout is unmistakably concrete'. It hardly needs to be pointed out that the adjective 'wild' is used significantly—for nights in the first and sea in the second poem—to suggest the disturbing sexual passion. In both the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

poems water imagery is maintained, for water is the symbol of fertility and is therefore directly linked with sex. The movement of the 'panti ıg dactyl' is also suggestive and the tranquil ending indicates the soothing contentment that follows the consummation of the sexual act. No wonder the Victorian Higginson hesitated to include this poem in his selection! Even Professor Johnson asks without answering the question: 'From what experience was she enabled to give these sensations an artistic creation?' The answer seems to me too obvious to need emphasis: wedlock is not the only source of sex experience and since 'any creation', as Professor Johnson points out, 'is a statement of something', even erotic dreams can be real enough to form the basic material for such poems.

III

Emily Dickinson's experience of love had two specific lessons for her. Love was to her like a boundless ocean which puts minor streams to rest and she, like a stream, found immense contentment in it.

> And now, I'm different from before,
> As if I breathed superior air—
> Or brushed a Royal Gown—
> My feet, too, that had wandered so—
> My Gipsy face—transfigured now—
> To Tenderer Renown—

Love also taught her 'Waiting with Myself' and 'fortitude of Fate'. Patience and fortitude thus acquired gave a new dimension to her personality and she could face the future with the belief that death could not debar her further from happiness which life had done before. 'Till it has loved', she wrote in a letter, 'no man or woman can become itself'. 'Love is its own rescue', she wrote again, 'for we—at our supremest are but its trembling Emblems'. She also remarked in one of her poems that she had no time for enmity or for love but, as some work was obligatory, she accepted 'The toil of love'. It was through the experience of love that Emily Dickinson matured and explored within herself 'the undiscovered continent'. The voyage of discovery gave a philosophical depth to her thinking and enriched her vision of

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

life as it also determined her rank as a poet. She wrote in one of her poems:

> The embers of a Thousand Years
> Uncovered by the Hand
> That fondled them when they were Fire
> Will gleam and understand

These lines could aptly be applied to her love poems. And the 'hand' that willingly tries to uncover the 'embers' knows that the fire 'gleams' as it also understands how rewarding such an experience is.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

EMILY DICKINSON AND THE LIVING WORD

I. N. AGRAWAL

EMILY DICKINSON appeared on the literary horizon at the end of a poetic movement which had its own themes and also a language in which they were expressed. Poetic movements, however, are no isolated phenomena. They are based on certain social realities and, as the social pattern changes, the modes of poetic expression also undergo transformation. If the constants dissolve and the variables assume an overwhelming proportion, then new constants are formed in the social spectrum. If, therefore, a writer wants to produce literature with a difference he must use language as an instrument of adjustment with reality. Such a writer would use diction, instead of poetic diction. The Renaissance writers had, therefore, discarded the poetic diction of the authors of the Medieval Age, and had invented their own lively verbal strategy which is so very full of life in the pages of Shakespeare, Marlowe and other Renaissance writers. The same attitude had been taken up by William Wordsworth when he had criticized the poetic diction of the writers of the Age of Reason. Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot in the twentieth century discarded the static word and experimented with new words or gave new situation and significance to the words by putting them somewhere significantly in the syntax. Emily Dickinson stands with these pioneers in her endeavour to adjust language to reality and in bringing it out of the verbal doldrums. This brought about a semantic rejuvenation.

Scattered throughout her poetry, lie many statements and observations regarding diction which she deemed important for poetry. It, therefore, shall be my endeavour in this report, to present Miss Dickinson's view on words, their choice, and their use, in short, her views on diction.

It may here be submitted that like all Puritans she was interested in the Word, for the Word was originally with God. She, however, was a Puritan with a difference. Allen Tate

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

recognises this fact in his essay on Emily Dickinson when he says, 'Cotton Mather would have burnt her for a witch'. Of course, this is an extreme view but the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Accordingly, she did not believe in the static word which may have only denotation and no connotation. She had felt the cleavage of the human mind which characterized the period in which she was born. This predicament she states in the following lines:

I felt a Cleaving in my Mind
As if my Brain had split
I tried to match it—Seam by Seam
But could not make it fit.
The thought behind, I strove to join
Unto the thought before—
But Sequence ravelled out of sound
Like Balls—upon a Floor.

To present the above dichotomy of the human psyche, particularly her own, she tried to take resort to the living Word. In one of her gnomic poems she expresses this idea:

A word is dead
When it is said
Some say.
I say it just
Begins to live
That day.

Word for her, therefore, was a living entity, an incarnation of thought and a visible and tangible proof of the life of the mind. Again and again in her writings we find fresh and strange evidence of this faith in the living word—a word which is multidimensional. The following two stanzas from two poems may elucidate the point I am trying to make:

Could any mortal lip divine
The undeveloped freight
Of a delivered syllable
'T would crumble with the weight.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

and

There is a word
which bears a sword
Can pierce an armed man
It hauls its barbed syllables—
At once is mute again.

We have now seen how significant the words were to this New England poetess. It was, however, not the lonely word which wrought such miracles for, as Maupassent had said so very cogently: 'Words have a soul. The majority of readers and even of writers require of them nothing more than a sense. But it is necessary, just the same, to discover and bring out this soul, which is revealed in their contact with other words, and which illuminates and transfigures certain books with ineffable splendour'. William Howard in his essay on Emily Dickinson's Poetic Vocabulary unfortunately limited himself largely to quantitative measurements and conventional meanings. Further, he located words as if they existed in her poems as flat and nerveless entities. Hence it is essential for us to examine Emily Dickinson's diction in action for though physically she led a most static life yet the life of her mind was most dynamic and reached far and wide.

What lends infinite charm to her poetry is the aptness and the variety of her diction. A poet usually has a variety of moods. At times he is serious and grave and at other times he is playful and frolicsome. The words ought to reflect this chiaroscuro of human reflection. In the case of Emily Dickinson we find a vast poetic vocabulary which reflects the light of her spirit. Longinus had much earlier pointed out this function of the word in these words: 'Beautiful words are in deed and in fact the very light of the spirit'. Further, we find that words here are apt for the theme and the purpose and they fully represent the moral and aesthetic ramifications of the poet's consciousness and sensibility. Variety in diction is a must because it sustains and heightens the interest of the reader. Words of different origins are used and juxtaposed to present the edge and the precipice, the mountains and the plains of Emily Dickinson's poetic being. This situation presents a peculiar tension and has a direct intellectual and emotional appeal. Thought and feelings are so juxtaposed that they almost fuse and stimulate the reader's consciousness.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

A word may here be said about the debt of Emily Dickinson to her predecessors. In a letter to her mentor Higginson she had said, 'For several years my Lexicon—was my only companion'. She was here referring to Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language. As these words of the dictionary passed through her mind they assumed life and sanctity and a moral and reflective aura. They were lifeless and still till the hand of Emily Dickinson breathed life into them. This reminds one of the mural paintings of Michalengelo in the Sistine Chapel where Adam has been depicted lifeless till God breathes life into him through his fingers. Other sources of language were the Bible and the works of Shakespeare. Many ways of diction she learnt from them.

Emily Dickinson has exercised much influence over the modern poetic sensibility. She was an imagist before the imagists of the first quarter of the twentieth century. A study of the texture of her poetry would be most necessary if we want to learn the secret of her magic charm. We today who are very conscious of the renewal of language must probe deep into her diction to arrive at the secret life of the words which live, and move and have their being in her writings. This word is the living word and it is immortal like God:

A Word that breathes distinctly
Has not the power to die
Cohesive as the spirit
It may expire if He—

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

'THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY': ITS MORAL DESIGN

P. S. CHAUHAN

ABOUT a quarter of a century after its publication, Henry James, trying to recapture the manner of the origin of *The Portrait of a Lady*, wrote: 'The germ of my idea ... must have consisted not at all in any conceit of a plot ... but altogether in the sense of a single character, the character and aspect of a character of a particular engaging young woman'.

Then, a little later, approving of Turgenieff's method: 'It (the fictive picture) began for him almost always with the vision of some person or persons, who hovered before him, soliciting him, as the active or passive figure, interesting him, and appealing to him just as they were and by what they were'.

He added, confidentially: 'I was myself so much more antecedently conscious of my figures than of their setting.... The point is, however, that this single corner-stone, the conception of a certain young woman affronting her destiny, had begun with being all my outfit for the large building of the Portrait of a Lady'.

I have tried in this Paper to demonstrate, in terms of the moral plan of the novel, that in writing this novel, Henry James, contrary to his retrospective statement—made, incidentally, on revisiting the book 25 years after its first publication—was haunted not by 'a particular engaging young woman' but by an engaging moral theme, and that the *Portrait* is the working out, not so much of the young woman's life and adventures as of a moral design. Yet the evidence—internal as much as external—that seems to corroborate James's avowal is anything but insignificant. The view that the heroine of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel Archer, derives her origin from Henry James' cousin made public first by the novelist's nephew, has been successively adopted by C. Hartley Grattan, Graham Greene, Ernest Sandeen and Leon Edel. In editing his father's letters Henry James (Jr.) remarked: 'Henry James drew two of his most appealing heroines from her (Minny Temple's) image, Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove* and Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady*.

James's own feeling description of his cousin would seem to

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

strengthen such a critical view. About his cousin he wrote in the Notes of a Son and Brother: 'Death, at the last, was dreadful (to her) . . . she would have given anything to live . . . (She was) the supreme case of a taste for life as life, as personal living'. Then, a few days later, he wrote to Grace Norton: 'She was a divinely restless spirit . . . and if she had lived to great age, I think it would have been as the victim and playing of her constant generous dreams and dissatisfactions'.

Now, both the statements, put together, do, indeed, make up a fair enough description of Isabel's state. But the difficulty in accepting such a view as the complete explanation of the origin of Isabel's story is at least three-fold. James's account of his cousin is as fair a description of Milly Theale, the heroine of *The Wings of the Dove*, as of Isabel Archer. But, as Mr O. Cargill points out: James seems to indicate only one full usage of his memory of Minny Temple: 'She would have given anything to live—and the image of this which was long to remain with me, appeared so of the essence of tragedy that I was in the far-off time to seek to lay the ghost by wrapping it . . . in the beauty and dignity of art'.

As against the biographical explanation of her origin, J. W. Beach, Cornelia Kelley and F. R. Leavis are of the opinion that Isabel's portrait is copied from that of Gwendolen Harleth in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*. O. Cargill and William Gibson would trace the ancestry of Isabel from the portrait of the heroine of *Far From The Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba. Fred B. Millet finds that: 'another possible source is his (James') bestowal on her of a considerable number of traits of his own younger self'.

The present author does not discount the various possibilities of James's inspiration, each of which, may, to an extent, be substantiated from one source or another. All the memories—of the living person or the imaginary—may well melt down in the creative imagination 'where all the waters meet' and cast up a single-synthetic image of being. It must, however, be pointed out that all such critical judgments tend to treat the novel as a fictive biography of some real or imaginary person. But, as it stands in its finished form, the novel can be considered only as a complex organisation of interests vital to James's aesthetic and moral attitude to life. And it is only the thing achieved that matters for us, not the conscious design of the author.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

The argument of the Paper, then, is that Isabel is conceived whatever the source of her origin—in terms of a central morality peculiarly Jamesian in its nature, and that the moral values not only condition the manner in which she would affront her destiny, but also prescribe the frame of action beyond which even her free exploits of life are not allowed to lure her. As an organising principle, the moral theme informs and pervades every other element of the novel too. For 'the sense of a single character' which alone, as James would have us believe, guided his hand, the plan of the novel would appear to be too compact and regular a phenomenon. For if the novel were merely the proliferation of a memory, or an escape from 'the vision of some person, who hovered before him', the author would certainly exercise his freedom in the picaresque tradition 'to invent whatever he requires' to illustrate the figure of his engaging young woman; he would, in that case, invent the plot as he went along, attaining at the end a loose and episodic novel at the best. But the novel, on the other hand, possesses, as James himself realised, a structure reared with an architectural competence the most proportioned of his productions after *The Ambassadors*. Most of the critics from Graham Greene through Leavis and Matthiessen have been struck by this quality of the novel. Biography of a person, and such a high regularity of the plot are incompatible. Yet none has cared to explain that the symmetrical figure of the plot could not be a lucky accident, nor that it cannot be a matter of mere technical competence. Its neat shape emerges from a well-defined moral plan embedded in it. In view of the regular design of the novel, as we shall see a little later it is, it would, indeed, be difficult to resist the conclusion that it was only after denying the importunities of the 'certain young woman' and subjecting her appeal to a rigorous moral discipline that James could so successfully impose upon her story the balanced and rounded perfection that the novel has come to acquire.

A brief analysis of the chief events of Isabel's life would discover for us the essentially moral pattern into which her life is set.

Poor and uninitiated, but romantic and curious, Isabel is eager to launch on some adventure of life. But this requires opportunities. An opportunity is offered her by her aunt, Mrs Touchett's adoption of her. With a highly responsive innocence, she comes out to absorb Europe. At this stage, her chief dread

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

in life was that 'she might appear narrow-minded', and her idea of happiness, a headlong plunge into life: 'A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see—that's my idea of happiness'.

But of the people around her not many can understand, much less appreciate, this urge for better and more knowledge of life. Caspar Goodwood, a man unredeemed and insensitive, a gymnast and an oarsman rather than a gleaner of dispersed knowledge, considers this a mere fad. But wanting to be good to her he asks her in his naif way: 'Do you want to improve your mind? Your mind is quite good enough for me; but if it interests you to wander about a while and see different countries, I shall be delighted to help you in any way in my power'.

Less insistent and exacting, but possessing greater power, a seat in Parliament and elegant tastes, the handsome and vivacious English noble, Lord Warburton, is puzzled when his polite offer of marriage is similarly turned down by Isabel. She knew that in rejecting him, she rejected 'the peace, the kindness, the honour, the possessions and a deep security'. But since a marriage would be an impediment in her 'free exploration of life', since that would separate her 'from life . . . from the usual chances and dangers, from what most people know and suffer', decline she must.

Now, the reactions of different people to this act of highly moral, though romantic, choice serve as a fair index of their respective moral preferences. Caspar Goodwood, involved in his own misery, growls over his rejection, and must extort the promise that she would marry no one else. Lord Warburton, puzzled at this unexpected behaviour, would yet accept the rejection quietly. Henrietta Stackpole, always confident, and always sure that Americans are the special creations of God, is happy that Isabel did not marry a rotten European. Mrs Touchett, on her part, attributes it to her niece's arrogance, and the fanciful notion that crowned princes will kiss her feet. Madam Merle just purses her lips and thinks there was a great opportunity lost, but would advise Isabel that she should be on her lookout in future. Mr. Touchett takes a more humane view and considers it fair enough that Isabel should be free to do what she pleases. Ralph alone, of all the persons, knows it to be a supreme exercise of moral choice, and is happy that she possesses that freedom. Now onwards, he will, like her Guardian Angel, watch her career, and, so far as

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

possible, protect her. Like Isabel, he would be a passionate pilgrim of experience too though Isabel alone be her Mecca: 'A character like that—a real passionate force to see at play, is the finest thing in Nature. It is finer than a great Titian, than a Gothic Cathedral'.

And though he should follow her like her shadow—how much different from Goodwood's shadowing her is that!—he would always leave her free 'to choose, to act, to contact'. He is pleased to observe and wonder: 'Given complete freedom what she would do with herself'. In all this, Ralph has more than ordinary scruples. He has a fair chance of marriage with Isabel should he so try. But he would not, for were she married she would be no longer free to indulge her fancy. And yet, if she is poor, she would be obliged to marry somebody, if only for her support. Recognising that freedom from want is a pre-condition for independent moral choice, he requests his father to alter the will to accommodate Isabel with half of his share amounting to £70,000. But he would not even so much as have it mentioned that it was done at his instance, or made over from his share. For if Isabel came to know of that she would constantly feel herself to be under some sort of obligation to him, and that is the last thing that Ralph would desire. All that he desires is: 'When she executes them—her intentions, that is—may I be there to see'.

Like a dispassionate worker in the laboratory, he is interested only in watching the working of a moral conscience, and so he would eliminate, carefully, all that is likely to interfere with the free behaviour of the object under study. Isabel herself is highly conscious of the nature of her quest. When on her arrival at the Gardencourt, she sits with gentlemen talking late into night, Mrs Touchett reminds her that it is not good for her to sit alone with men. She had therefore better retire to her room and go to bed. Then follows a piece of dialogue significant in that it not only illumines Isabel's character but also defines James' moral pre-engagement:

'You're too fond of your own ways'.

'Yes, I think I am very fond of them. But I always want to know the things one shouldn't do'.

'So as to do them?' asked her aunt.

'So as to choose', said Isabel.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

But in spite of all her desire and Ralph's care, she can't retain that freedom to choose for very long. Madame Merle, a vicious and calculating person, whose sophistication is merely a device to hoodwink people into accepting her at a high price, coldly tricks the inexperienced Isabel into a loveless marriage with another villain, Osmond, whose love of art, like her own, is retained for its snob-value. In doing so, Madame Merle wishes to provide her illegitimate daughter from Osmond with Isabel's newly acquired wealth. Seeing only one side of the moon and burning with the sentimental desire to sacrifice herself for her step-daughter—in much the same way as Ralph had for her—Isabel enters into matrimony with Osmond only to discover that he is a highly egotistical prig, a jealous husband, a bully and a black-mailer. Ironical as it may seem, the very first touch with life sears her. Then, when Ralph lies dying in England, she must go to him even though it means a break with her husband who has been mortally jealous of her cousin. Once in England, and her money still safe with her, she is free to stay on there. And there is Lord Warburton still and Caspar Goodwood, again, offering her peace and protection. He 'offers her the very liberty, which has cost her so much'. But all that she has for him, even after that great and the only passionate scene in her life, is: 'Do me the greatest kindness of all . . . I beseech you to go away'. To abandon her husband, and to accept another, would be a failure of duty and an act of moral cowardice. So she must go back to him in Rome, even though living with him dispossess her of her spirits, liberty and wealth. She, thus, makes another, and the final, moral choice which, indeed, is much greater than the earlier one: of declining Lord Warburton's offer.

In all this movement of the plot, it is obvious, there is a great regularity. With the first moral decision, Isabel began her career; the last one seals it. The earlier one meant the rejection of a noble person; the later means the acceptance of a vicious one. The wheel has come full circle. It is this completeness of moral design that gives the plot, at least partially, its balanced and regular shape. Through suffering, Isabel has arrived from inexperience of life into maturity of experience; from innocence into knowledge. Like Eliot's Tiresias, she has suffered all in the moral wasteland of Europe. When she arrived in England first, she wanted to see the ghost at Garden-court. She finally saw it in Osmond's

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Italian Villa, symbolically enough called . . . . . —the dark rock. Released from the necessities of Jamesian dialectics, which, as in others, form the bed-rock of the novel's plan, she would affront her destiny quite differently. Both the perfect figure of the plot, and the irony that operates it, suggest that the story is much more than 'an ado about Isabel Archer'. The novel is, unmistakably, shaped and controlled by a well-formed moral idea.

That for him the central idea, or the philosophy has greater importance than any other element of the novel is stated by James in many of his critical writings. In *The Art of Fiction* (1891), wrote James: 'The "story", if it represents anything, represents the subject, the idea, the *donnee*, of the novel . . . This sense of the story being the idea, the starting-point, of the novel, is the only one that I see in which it can be spoken of as something different from its organic whole . . . in proportion as the work is successful the idea permeates and penetrates it, informs and animates it, so that every word and every punctuation-point contribute directly to the expression . . . . The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and the thread. . . .'

The idea informs the story, and determines the form, not the figure of a single character, howsoever vivid its portrait to the mind! Writing of Turgenieff's practice also, he accepted the primacy of the author's philosophy or morality in whose terms alone can the character be conceived: 'The great question as to a poet or a moralist is: How does he feel about life? What, in the last analysis, is his philosophy?. . . . This is the most interesting thing their works offer us. Details are interesting in proportion as they contribute to make it clear'.

Precisely. Details are interesting only in proportion as they contribute to make the moral design clear. Isabel may well be the focus of the story, but she constitutes but one movement in the total figure of the narrative carpet. Had James been 'much more antecedently conscious' of her figure than of her setting, and had her attributes alone dominated James's composition, details would tend to cluster round her, and would hardly have any relevance to the central design to which all the characters of the novel do, indeed, pay tribute. But in reality, of personal details there are very few in the novel. Talk of Isabel's dress and habit is generally smothered, of her physical charms, glossed over. Even her adventures extending through England, over France, Italy,

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Egypt, Turkey, Greece and Rome are dismissed in a cryptic fashion: 'Isabel travelled rapidly and recklessly; she was like a thirsty person draining cup after cup'. When not bearing on James' chosen predilections, even her feelings are summarily brushed aside: (this time the author himself is speaking): 'I may not attempt to report in its fulness our young woman's response to the deep appeal of Rome, to analyse her feelings as she trod the pavement of the Forum. . . . It is enough to say that her impression was such as might have been expected of a person of her freshness and her eagerness'. On the contrary, whenever Isabel's situation is conducive to the unfolding of the novelist's moral plan, the narrative longingly lingers over the scene until the whole situation has been vividly brought to life.

But were the moral plan of the novel not deducible from some other element of the novel—say, from the qualitative analysis of characters—it would, perhaps, be invalid still to argue that a moral plan is embedded in the plot of the novel. But, first, what is the Jamesian scale of human values? Sharing the nineteenth-century tradition of liberal thought, James could not but have a scrupulous regard for the individual and his personal world. But in an age when all the moral values, faced, as it were, by a universally destructive element, were crumbling down, the highest virtue in an individual, the greatest destiny for him, thought James, could be an enriched consciousness. If 'humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms' no man who has not lived fully, drinking knowledge through every pore, would ever be a whole man. It is only when one has enriched himself through living and feeling that one attains to universal sympathy and tolerance—the two cardinal virtues in the Jamesian universe. In a letter written to A. C. Benson, he summed up his creed thus: 'If there be wisdom in not feeling—to the last throb—the great things that happen to us, it is a wisdom I shall never either know or esteem. Let your soul live—it is the only life that isn't, on the whole, a sell'.

James's prized characters, therefore, are 'passionate pilgrims of experience' who from the brave new world keep on sailing to the old in search of loving knowledge. It is in keeping with this faith that James celebrates in the *Portrait*, as in his major novels too, the 'renewal of existence by endless cultivation, of experience'. Milly Theale, the heroine of the *Wings of the Dove* would have

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

given anything to live longer. But doomed as she is, it breaks her heart to know that she may die without even the commonest of the chances to love or be loved. It is, of course, left to Strether, in *The Ambassadors*, to give Jamesian value the most passionate expression. Impressed by the parade of youth and beauty in Gloriani's garden, and regretting his own lost youth, he advises Bilham not to repeat his own mistake: 'Live all you can; it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular, so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what have you had?'

But every time the desire for more of human knowledge is indulged in, it is crossed and frustrated, either by a personal limitation or the hostile new environment. It is this dialectic of human desire to 'know' Faust-like illimitably, and the inability to do so that forms the staple yarn of most of James' major novels from *The Portrait* (1881), through the *Wings of the Dove* (1902), to *The Ambassadors* (1903). The recurring pattern of human destiny, as exhibited in these novels, would indicate that the terms, in which Isabel's confrontation with her destiny is rendered are in no way peculiar to her but a part of the familiar Jamesian ethics, and, as such, they are controlled by his major interests.

But enlightened consciousness alone is not a great value. According to the premium put upon characters, James' values would seem to fall into two distinct, though overlapping, groups: social and aesthetic. A good social morality, according to James, is that which is catholic—represented in *The Portrait* by Ralph and Mr Touchett, and, to an extent, by Isabel. A good aesthetic morality, similarly, is that which is inclusive and humane—which none but Ralph, again, represents. But as both the social morality and the aesthetic must, in order to be good, have the common basis of enlightenment, humanity and tolerance, the terms social and aesthetic, in final analysis, become interchangeable. James does not, indeed, discriminate between ethics and aesthetics. that which socially is a good conduct, and that alone, is beautiful, is aesthetic; that which is narrow, selfish, parochial and insensitive is unsocial and ugly. In personal morality, then, that alone is beautiful—ethically and aesthetically—which is capable of humanity, generosity, good taste, modesty and tolerance. Good taste alone is not enough. Osmond is a connoisseur but dehumanised as he is, he exemplifies positive evil. Ned Rosier, a collector of

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

curios, is a better human being than Osmond for he possesses the humanity and strength enough to sacrifice for his love. For the sake of Pansy, he can sell out his life-long collection of the glass managerie.

Insatiable curiosity, therefore, for its own sake would not be very desirable. It is to be cultivated for the fruitful moral dividends that accrue from it. To know more is to love humanity better—and 'love remains. It (pain) passes, after all...' To love is to forbear and forgive. So James's heroes and heroines, like Prospero, live to realise that in forgiveness alone consists the greatest virtue:

> '... the rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance'.

Though deprived of her freedom, cheated out of her happiness, and subjected, by her callous husband, to a degrading existence, she must, like others of her line, return to him. Milly Theale discovers, lying on her death-bed, that she has been a victim of a great hoax and that Densher's love, her only consolation, was just a make-believe, intended to cheat her out of her wealth. The shock is so great that it breaks all her will to live. She turns to the wall to die. But before she breathes her last she must get over her disillusionment, forgive her betrayer, and bless him with a large share in her will. Similarly, Strether, at first suspicious of every Parisian move, comes to acquire—as he grows in moral stature—a rare serenity which encompasses, besides peace, universal love and a wide moral sympathy. Such then are the elements of James's moral design. He may vary the pattern of the moral scheme, as he moves from one novel to another, but elements remain the same, emphases the same. That love and forgiveness are the most precious virtues of human life was his conscious belief also. In a moment of agony to his life-long confidante, Grace-Norton, he wrote to console her: 'We all live together, and those of us who *love and know*, live so most'.

It is arguable that the story of Isabel's growth and forgiveness is the story rendered in terms which were always to remain with James. James does not follow where a girl of her initial makeup would have led. She is obliged to keep step with him!

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

But James' finest characters in addition to social-aesthetic consciousness must have a spiritual grace which consists in the recognition of the morally good or corrupt. Their conscience is: 'a form of sensibility, a style of life, a state of mind ... Their possession of a moral sense is for them even a kind of fatality; it is also a kind of chivalry'. They possess an 'unbought grace of life' because they have the wit to distinguish moral beauty: 'Any failure of discrimination is sin, whereas virtue is a compound of intelligence, moral delicacy, and the sense of the past'.

From *The Portrait* to *The Golden Bowl*, all of James's principal characters possess this moral delicacy—Isabel's history is not unique but similar to several others. Isabel must return to her husband for that alone is 'right'. When she comes to see her dying cousin, Ralph, he implores her:

'You must stay here'.

'I should like to stay—as long as seems right'.

'As seems right—as seems right?' Ralph repeated her words.

'Yes, you think a great deal about that'.

'Of course one must. You're very tired', said Isabel.

A choice very much similar to Isabel's is made by Strether—not, of course, for a miserable union but for no less miserable a separation. Strether has gone to Maria Gostrey, his alter ego, to take leave of her. She makes an attempt to keep him:

'There's nothing you know, I wouldn't do for you'.

'I know, I know ... But all the same I must go—To be right'.

'To be right?'

'That, you see, is my only logic'.

That was the logic of Isabel's decision too. And she must have that logic for that is James's logic too, and he can give her none other. She is only one of those through whom James has chosen to convey his moral predilections.

One of his most satisfying novels, *The Portrait of a Lady* has an unusual degree of 'felt life' in it and a perfect 'air of reality'. Yet one can't ignore the fact that Isabel's story falters at least twice. At the two most crucial points in her career it rings false and insincere. Refusal of an accomplished and well-provided gentleman

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

like Lord Warburton would sound unnatural even in a more idealistic, and wealthier, girl than Isabel. Then, her decision to go back to her husband after all that has happened, to a person who, as she realises, has an immense 'faculty for making everything wither that he touched, spoiling everything for her that he looked at' is irritating even to the most indulgent reader of James'—irritating because it does not 'naturally follow some other thing, either by necessity or as a rule'. The reason why the story goes limp here is not far to seek. It goes limp because James has abandoned 'the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle'.

The honest fact is that James has wrenched and twisted Isabel's story to suit the ends of his peculiar morality. She has to reject Warburton in order to be free to explore life and, later on to come to grief. And she must return to Osmond for that alone is 'right'. Isabel's decisions and actions are less in accordance with the reality of her character and more in keeping with James's choice, morality. If James' account of the origin of *The Portrait* is to be trusted it would appear that having stipulated with the insistent image of his young woman to let her have the freedom to affront her destiny in her own way, he has later on engaged her to carry out his own moral expedition!

Not only is Isabel conceived in terms of Jamesian morality. All the characters of the novel are arranged in a certain systematic relationship to the central morality that steadily controls and shapes the plot. One could, in this context, quote, with a certain amount of relevance, the remark made by T. S. Eliot about James's invention in general: 'Done in a clean, flat drawing, each is extracted out of a reality of its own, substantial enough; everything given is true for that individual; but what is given is chosen with great art for its place in a general scheme. . . .'

The characters of *The Portrait* are arranged in proportion to their sympathy for others and richness of their consciousness. In order to demonstrate the interaction of these qualities the author would, naturally, be obliged, first, to find the nearest approximation to the ideal; and, then, invent parallel examples who possess those virtues in a varying degree, and contrasting examples too who would be varying negations of the ideal. Implicit in the created 'array of characters' is an unmistakable symmetry of construction. According to the degree of disappearing ideal, charac-

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

ters can be arranged in a descending order, most of them finding their counterpart or contrast in another:

Women	*Men*
1. Finest among women is Isabel who though innocent is discriminating, and opening out towards life. (Henrietta Stackpole, Isabel's foil doesn't get a male counterpart)	Worthy as Isabel's mate is 1. A. Ralph Touchett who as a cool, selfless and detached person is active only at the spiritual level, representing what James was searching in human civilisation 33. He has, indeed, 'seen the Holy Land' 34. 1. B. Lord Warburton would have suited Isabel if she were to dismount her high horse of forced principles.
2. Mrs Touchett, hard as nails and oblivious of everything but her own comforts, is negation of the ideal but doesn't show any positive evil in her nature.	2. Mrs Touchett's male counterpart in the novel is Caspar Goodwood, always sure of himself, always involved with himself.
3. Pansy, desiring to love but not having the courage to declare or own it, is part dehumanised.	3. Her match among men is the devitalised Ned Roiser, a flimsy by-product of the urban culture.
4. At the other end of the feminine scale is Madam Merle who knows the price of everything but value of nothing, and who plans everything from a selfish point of view.	4. At the other end of the masculine scale, and a living negation of the serene and philosophic Ralph, is Osmond, a cynical, egotistical, pretentious and dehumanised entity.

One explanation, then, of the perfectly satisfactory structure of the novel is that here, as not in many other novels, characters of various shades and tints have been arranged to compose a balanced moral design with a perfect harmony of tone.

The final reason for its high regularity, however, would be that its moral plan, co-existent and co-terminus with the plot, and suffusing the whole of created vision, gives the novel, in return, what James looked for in vain in George Eliot's Middlemarch: 'an organised, moulded, balanced composition, gratifying the reader with a sense of design and construction'.

About the 'impression of life' enshrined in *The Portrait* there is nothing so peculiar as to differentiate it from those of James's

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

major novels. It would, therefore, be hard to justify any assertion that the novel is the illustration of the life or personality of a particular young woman—real or imaginary. Partaking of the central values of James' system, and rendered in typically Jamesian moral terms, *The Portrait of a Lady* is something more than—and something different from—a mere accretion of the image of a young woman affronting her destiny. And it is for its peculiarly Jamesian quality that *The Portrait* is universally accepted as forming a significant part of the Jamesian canon. In *The Portrait* James attempted to offer his cherished values the first trial in terms of art.

REFERENCES

1. *The Art of the Novel*, ed. by R. P. Blackmur (Scribner, 1950), Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, p. 42.
2. Ibid., p. 42-43.
3. Ibid., p. 44.
4. *The Letters of William James*, ed. by Henry James (Jr.), (Boston, 1920), p. 36, I.
5. *Notes of a Son and Brother*, Henry James, p. 479.
6. The Letter Quoted by F. O. Matthiessen: The Major Phase.
7. *Notes of a Son and Brother*, H. James, p. 479.
8. Introduction *The Portrait of a Lady*, Mod. Lib. (N.Y. 1951), p. xxvi.
8. (*a*) *The Structure of the Novel*—Edwin Muir (Hogarth), pp. 17-19.
9. *The Art of the Novel:* Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* ed. R. P. Blackmur, p. 52.
10. Leavis: *The Great Tradition* (Chatto and Windus), 1962, pp. 126-53. Graham Greene: *Introduction to The Portrait of a Lady*, pp. iii-xiii. F. O. Matthiessen: the Major Phase.
11. *The Portrait of a Lady*, Mod. Lib. (N.Y.), 1951, I.
12. Ibid., Vol. I.
13. Ibid., Vol. I.
14. Ibid., Vol. I.
15. Ibid., p. 93, I.
16. Ibid., p. 436, II.
17. *The House of Fiction* (The Art of Fiction), ed. Leon Edel (Hart-Davis London), 1957, p. 39.
18. Ibid., p. 173.
19. *The Portrait*, p. 38, II.
20. Ibid., the opening of ch. XXVII, p. 413, I.
21. *The Ambassadors*, H. James, (E.M.L.), p. 129, Bk. V, II.
22. I am indebted to Prof. W. Gibson for helping me to this aspect of Rosier's personality.
23. *The Portrait*, p. 416, II.
24. *The Tempest*, Shakespeare, Act., V. Sc. I, 11, 31-32.
25. *Henry James* (Viking Library), p. 650.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

26. *Henry James:* His Life and Works, E. W. Dupee, 1956.
27. *The Question of Henry James*—Phillip Rahv.
27. (*a*) *The Portrait*, p. 416, II.
28. *The Ambassadors.*
29. *The Portrait*, p. 188, II.
30. Aristotle defines the end of plot in the terms: 'An end on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it'. Poetics, VII, 3.
31. *The Art of Fiction*, Henry James.
32. *T. S. Eliot:* The Little Review, 1918.
33. *The Great Tradition*, F. R. Leavis.
34. Introduction: *The Portrait of a Lady*, Graham Greene.
35. *Essay on George Eliot*—Henry James.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH

AN English critic has with all the brilliance of a brains-trust man, branded modern American Poetry rhetorical. He thinks that Walt Whitman has 'shadowed the American horizon all too long' and despite his apparently cautious note he does make a grossly simple distinction between English and American Poetry. He says: 'There are poets who have something to say and like Milton in *Paradise Lost* search for a poetic way and those like Keats who are excited by the exploiting possibilities of language. To the first class belong American poets and the second class belong English poets. That is, in American poetry there is application of craftsmanship to ideas and not the use of ideas as material for Poetry'. Though what he says of Milton will be readily conceded, it is hardly fair to bracket poets like Pound, Frost, Carlos Williams, Cummings, Eliot, Stevens and the angry young men of San Francisco Bay—all as varied in vision as in technique. It is interesting that his standards of reference for both English and American poetry are *not* modern poets, and what is more, not American poets—which leaves one with the inescapable conclusion that the critic is simply not equipped for his task. It is good to remember there is no English poet (Yeats is Irish, after all) in the 20th century who can measure up to Pound, T. S. Eliot, Frost and Wallace Stevens in achievement and influence.

It should now be our endeavour to understand the nature of their achievement. A text from Mr Eliot provides as good a starting point as any for the discussion. It is in his American days that Mr Eliot told us that sensibility alters from generation to generation but expression is altered only by a man of genius. Of the four major,* that is, major American poets mentioned above, Frost alone didn't seem to be too preoccupied with the problems of expression, while for the other three it might be said to be a major concern, and it may not be wrong to say that their importance as poets is in proportion to the extent they solved the question of

* The treatment thus leaves out quite a few minor poets. But they are hardly significant in a general treatment like the present.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

language. Not that this alone determined their places in the hierarchy but of the other contributory factors that made them great discussion can be deferred for the present.

While by and large Wordsworth and Coleridge were perhaps the last English poets to concern themselves in a central way with the language of poetry, it is worthy of note that throughout the 19th century the Americans have constantly wrestled with the problem. It is amazing how Poe anticipated the modern poet's main problem more than a hundred years ago. And along with him even the writers of prose like Emerson and Thoreau seem to have given sufficient thought to the question. To Emerson, in a poem, words become one with things and to him therefore a nation's language is made by peasants and poets. As for Thoreau, he wanted to reason from the hand to the brain. Being refreshed by reading of the 17th century English Metaphysical poets Alcott, a Transcendentalist like Emerson and Thoreau wanted 'to recover the animal spirit which once sparkled and pranked itself in the buxomness and proud motion of our mother tongue'. And Lowell, the poet, wanted that 'Yankee Lingo' in the hope of 'escaping the faint perfume of musk which Mr Tennyson has left behind him'. Whitman's view is quite characteristic of the bard: 'Language is not the abstract construction of the dictionary-makers but is something arising out of the work of generations of humanity and has its basis broad and low close to the ground. Its final decisions are made by the masses'. We have seen how to Emily Dickinson the word was a living thing. The list is long and tiring but quite impressive, perhaps useful in the context of our present discussion, as it establishes a continuity in the exploration of the possibilities of language poetry.

Added to the American democratic predilection for the 'Yankee Lingo' and an over-mastering desire for freedom from excessive reliance upon English modes of writing, there must have been a poetic necessity at the turn of the century for experimentation, thanks to the perfection of the Miltonic diction which led the Romantic, Victorian and even Georgian poets, most of them at least, to sterility in thought, feeling and speech. It hasn't been sufficiently realized by critics and literary historians that the modern American poet could hardly look up to an inspiring model among English poets who came after the 17th century Metaphysicals. (The early Yeats paid the price for looking to

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Shelley.) It was just as well for American poetry that it was so, for it was thus left largely to its own resources and consequently made a Poe and a Whitman *and*, we now know, an Emily Dickinson possible in the 19th century. And so by the beginning of the present century the American poet had travelled a long way and was naturally at an advantage over his English counterpart.

Rebels and exiles were not wanting in America at any time, certainly not in the early decades of the 20th century. Ezra Pound's was perhaps the first well-known attempt to reform the language of poetry. He was concerned with 'the betrayal of the word . . . the word that does not fit the truth'. What, then, asked Pound, is the solution? To him it was the same as Confucius's: 'When Confucius was asked: what was the first thing he would do if he came to power? he answered, 'to call people and things by their true and proper names'. This was vital to Pound for, when something is wrong with the arts, he argued, everything is wrong. 'When a hormone defects, it will defect throughout the whole system'.

Precisely for this reason the time was propitious for Pound. For in England, Hulme the author of *Speculations*, who said, 'I hate the best of the Romantics; I hate their whining and moaning', had started a Poetry Club in 1908 and because of its excessive formality had resigned and formed another with Flint. Assuming a need for experiment they studied Japanese and Hebrew poetry and the French Symbolists giving special attention to imagery. Pound, the expatriate, was present at these meetings. By then he and Yeats had come in contact with the French Symbolists and their conversations and discussions on Wednesday afternoons in London were the origin of the short-lived, though historically significant, Imagist movement in England and America. These imagists brought to 'bear a conciseness, a sculptured hardness, the craftsman's conscience and above all, their horror of rhetoric'. Aldington, the first to be labelled Imagist argued that a new cadence meant a new idea.*

* We may recall how more than 2,000 years ago Plato realised the importance of innovation in music when he wrote in the IV Book of his *Republic:* Any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole State and ought to be prohibited. When modes of music change the fundamental laws of the State always change with them.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Ezra Pound, one of the founders of the new movement affirmed his belief in the need for a change of the verse form to express a new sensibility:

> The age demanded an image
> Of its accelerated grimace
> Not, not certainly the obscure reveries
> Of the inward gaze.

To him metre didn't matter: the musical phrase was everything. He claimed that Rhyme released much ethereal music flows from it. That in itself may be counted as an important achievement for modern poetry. It is enough to remember that long after the wandering minstrel was forgotten the spoken word of the poet, his singing voice, became the rage of the people everywhere. Even that highly cerebral poem, *The Waste Land* is described as 'a music of ideas'. The *Four Quartets* aspire to a condition of music and clearly follow the musical pattern. The point to remember is that Ezra Pound wrote his Imagist poems about 1910 and published four of them in 1912 in *Poetry*, founded by Harriet Monroe at Chicago.

There were at this time numerous little magazines and anthologies of poetry in which figured Frost, Lindsay, Lee Masters, Fletcher, Conrad Aiken, Robert Jaffares, MacLeish, and Sandburg, not to speak of experimenters like Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams. Again, in the South, there were quite a few promising writers of verse at the time, such as John Crow Ransom, Allen Tate and Donald Davidson. It 'wasn't distinguished poetry, though praised nationally'. But 'there was a deftness of touch, an absence of stilted and pompous rhetoric and an awareness of word values' in their verse. Ransom, the chief of them all tried to avoid those 'amiable accents' of his Southern predecessors and write on 'the great moments of the soul.' It is important, however, to remember that his 'Poems about God' remind one of Hardy. And it is not for nothing that Mr Eliot later complained (in *An Examination of Ezra Pound*):

'Whatever may have been in the literary scene in America between the beginning of the century and the year 1914, it remains in my mind a complete blank ... Undergraduates at Harvard in my time read the English poets of the 90 s who were dead:

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

That was as near as we could get to any living tradition. Certainly I cannot remember any English poet then alive who contributed to my own education.... I do not think it too sweeping to say, that there was no poet (in England or America) who could have been of use to a beginner in 1906. The only recourse was to poetry of another language. Browning was more of a hindrance than a help, for he had gone some way, but not far enough, in discovering a contemporary idiom. And at that stage, Poe and Whitman had to be seen through French eyes. The question was still: where do we go from Swinburne? And the answer appeared to be, "nowhere"'.

We have seen that new paths were struck by Pound in his Imagist poems but as someone put it: 'Pound was forced to discover modernity. Eliot was modern from the beginning'. (Louise Bogan in *Achievement in Modern American Poetry*. p. 64, A Gateway Edition). Eliot says 'the form in which I began to write, in 1908 or 1909 was directly drawn from the study of Laforgue together with the later Elizabethan drama'. And when Pound met Eliot in 1914 he wrote to Marriet Monroe to whom he was the sole 'foreign adviser' about new poetry: 'I am jolly well right about Eliot. He has sent in the best poem I have yet seen from an American. Pray God he be not a single and unique success. .... He is the only American I know of who has made what I call adequate preparation for writing. He has actually trained *and* modernised himself on his own. The rest of the promising young have done one or the other, but never both'. The result: Eliot's first well-known poem, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, was published in *Poetry* in 1915. From this point onwards Eliot's importance increased and in spite of the fact that Pound wrote his very distinguished poem, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* in 1920 and in spite of the fact that Eliot acknowledged his debt to Pound in very generous terms*, it is Eliot, more than Pound, that

* 'A man who devises new rhythms is a man who extends and refines our sensibility.... I have in recent years cursed Mr. Pound often enough: for I am never sure that I can call my verse my own; just when I am most pleased with myself, I find that I have caught up some echo from a verse of Pounds.' And again: 'I cannot think of any one writing verse, of our generation and the next, whose verse (if any good) has not been improved by the study of Pound's'. Quoted by F. R. Leavis in *New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 133 from *The Dial*, January 1928.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

really 'strove to resuscitate the dead art of poetry; to maintain the sublime in the old sense'. Such was Eliot's prestige (in America, not in England when he arrived for good in 1927. It took 10 to 15 years before he was accepted as a great poet, thanks largely to the critical labours of F. R. Leavis) that when Allen Tate published a poem in *The Double Dealer* it seems Hart Crane thought that Eliot was the likely source of his style. Tate who hadn't read Eliot till then quickly started reading him and began what he calls 'an impertinent campaign in Eliot's behalf'. As a result *The Waste Land* was reviewed in the 4th issue of the *Fugitive*. Ransom however thought that the poem brought to head 'all the specifically modern errors'. . . . 'its extreme disconnection', 'its extreme free verse' and his 'debasing' of 'lovely borrowed lines' by his 'distortions'. And Ransom blames it all on the typical American pursuit of novelty. Meanwhile the young Penn Warren 'caught the Eliot infection in virulent form'. By and by even Ransom came round to like Eliot when he discovered he was in the tradition. It is ironical that Ransom's own poetry is keyed to a speaking rather than a singing voice.

Let us briefly examine whether in his what is now considered to be the most influential poem of the century, Mr Eliot is guilty of the typical American pursuit of novelty or whether his essential American sensibility, which was really a compound of so many influences, European and Asian—far from being a drawback, was not the cause of his immense prestige as a poet today. His early poems are satires on American gentility. *The Boston Evening Transcript*, *Mr Apeneck Sweeny* and *The Preludes* are explorations of life in the back streets of metropolitan cities such as New York and Boston. Professor Willard Thorp tells us in his recent book, *American Writing in the 20th Century*, that the last two lines of Eliot's *Hollowmen* turned up five times in a year in Hollywood. (For that matter they were quoted by the Indian Prime Minister, Mr Nehru then in prison, as early as 1930 in his *Autobiography*.) To come back to *The Waste Land*, it is most unlikely that any Englishman could have written this poem. Only an American poet and an American poet of the highest order (for receptivity to outside influences has been in the American tradition ever since Emerson) could have assimilated all that mass of material —that heap of broken images—and integrated it and given it a form. Well, Pound tried to do it in his *Cantos*, but they became

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

'a rag bag' and they have no unity and they don't constitute great poetry anyway. Consider on the contrary, a few lines from the first section of *The Waste Land* to see how the poet's shaping spirit of imagination has amalgamated disparate experience to produce a pattern out of this chaotic material: See section 1, lines 43-59.

One would naturally ask: What are all these broken bits doing in the poem? Madame Sosostris: the name (thanks to its three Ss) sounds so fishy and yet she is supposed to be the modern version of those water-diviners who foretold the prospects of the coming year by looking at the water-level of the Nile, *the* river of Egypt, which would otherwise be a vast desert. This famous clairvoyant has a bad cold and she can't see things clearly, let alone see into the life of things. But she must make a living, though her knowledge is a mockery of the divine knowledge she professes, for she uses the cards but does not know the meaning of what is on their back. All that wisdom to her is blank and what is worse she is forbidden to see it, for her trade is a far cry from the wisdom which the Phoenician merchants used to carry on their backs along with their merchandise. Much less can she see the Hanged Man, that is, Christ, while 'death by water' is the surest means of regeneration for Ferdinand who was drowned in the sea and suffered a rich sea-change, to Madame Sosostris it is a source of fear: 'Fear death by water'. How can she appreciate the transformation wrought by the sea? 'Those are pearls that were his eyes'—this profoundly meaningful line, taken from *The Tempest*, becomes in the II section of *The Waste Land*, a 'Shakesperian rag' 'so elegant, so intelligent'—it sounds like the superficial drawing room conversation in a sophisticated household in a decadent age, which it actually is. Again the crowds of people walking round in a ring going round and round fixing their eyes on their own feet totally oblivious of their fellow-men or of their own destination do not cause any concern in this prophetess. And yet this clairvoyante, this wisest woman in Europe is no more wise than the statesmen presiding over the destinies of Europe and innocent of their *and* mankind's great heritage and ultimate destiny. But then, isn't there a horoscope which will foretell your future? And so why bother about ancient wisdom? But even horoscope-reading has become a shady transaction and one must be so careful of the police.

The passage has thus a rich texture and only a poet of the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

order of Mr Eliot could make it so meaningful—make it a profound comment on 'the immense panorama of anarchy and futility, that is contemporary history'. What this one passage does, the whole poem does to a greater extent: The Hyacinth girl; Tristram and Iseult; Elizabeth and Leicester; the Cockney Woman and her husband who has gone to the war—all form the same pattern, namely, frustration in love, a life of *unfulfilment*. In the myths the Fisher King violated the honour of women and brought about the waste land and in the waste land of today it's the small house agent's clerk, that young man carbuncular that assaults the bored typist with his bold stare; their love is the same as that of the young men, the loitering heirs of city directors, who go in search of 'nymphs' on the banks of the Thames and depart without leaving their addresses—a situation bad enough but not so degrading as the merchant Mr Eugenides inviting in demotic French one of his own sex to spend the week-end at the Metropole. As if to give a meaning to all this ugliness is the mention of 'the chair she sat in' which glowed on the marble like a burnished throne meaning thereby Cleopatra who sacrificed an empire for the sake of love. We may also recall Stetson who is every woman's son, the one who fought the Peleponnesian and Carthagenian Wars, the same that fought the Great War—for all wars are the same: to remedy injustice by unjust means; the 'unreal city under the brown fog of a winter dawn' which is the same as the unreal city of Baudelaire and both of them how different from the City of God of St Augustine and the city on earth of the ancient Greek City States where the city was the Mother and the individual had no existence of his own and no happiness apart from the city. But here a crowd flows over London Bridge, no different from the water—the anonymous water that flows below; each man walks with his eyes fixed on his own feet and totally impervious to the fate of his fellow-men; each imprisoned in his own cell. Such is the waste land of the 20th century.

Is there no way out of it?

Eliot is too great a poet to portray all this futile existence and leave us to our fates. For he knows it isn't enough for a poet to portray beauty or ugliness but must see beneath both beauty and ugliness: the horror, the boredom and the glory of existence. We have hardly had any vision of that glory so far except a faint glimpse of that inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold in Magnus Martyr.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

That becomes all the more clear to us when we get to know of the various disciplines which have fertilized his imagination—the vegetation myths, the fertility myths, the Holy Grail, the Vedas and the Upanishads, Buddha and St Augustine not to speak of nuclear physics and depth psychology. Consider only one of them, his use of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad in the last section of *The Waste Land:* What the Thunder said:

> Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
> Waited for rain, while the black clouds
> Gathered far distant over Himavant.
> The jungle crouched, humped in silence.

Ganga: Consider how he has exploited all the emotive possibilities of the word as of the other word, Himavant. Here *Ganga* obviously means the river of India, that river on whose banks great civilizations flourished and mighty empires rose and fell and so the story of the Ganga is the story of India. And now, just imagine this river of life going dry! But there it means more than that river, for Ganga is not merely *the* river, but any river, indeed all water, as Ganga is a generic term for water. In the Bhagavatha, Dadhichi, the sage offers his very backbone for the gods to make a club out of it and kill the demon and release the relentless clouds which are gathered far over distant Himavanth. In the Rig Veda we hear of the *Sapta Sindhu* (the seven rivers) lying imprisoned because of a curse that had befallen the land. Here in this myth, Mr Eliot knows, is the answer to modern man's malady, to the contemporary situation which is:

> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water.

Here the bones under the Juniper tree are lying scattered and they sing:

> We are glad to be scattered
> We did little good to each other.

It is worth exploring if Mr Eliot's repeated reference to the bones in *The Waste Land* and in *The Ash Wednesday* does not carry with it an implicit contrast with all that the message of *Datta* suggests in

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

the Upanishad. There the bone of the sage gave a new lease of life to gods as well as men. And in the modern waste land—

> We are in a rats' alley
> Where the dead men lost their bones
> . . . . . .
> And bones cast in a little low dry garret
> Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.

In such a predicament, the words of the Upanishad 'Da, Da, Da, Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata' have an operative significance and are not mere pedantry. Listen to the reverberation of meaning and above all of feeling in 'Da Da Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata'.

Dayadhvam (sympathise) and *Damyata* (control) were meant for demons and gods respectively while *datta* (give) was meant for Man. Gods and demons yet

> Their saving motto keep, but men forget.

And hence the importance of making 'give' perhaps the central theme of *The Waste Land*. He has already told us in terms familiar to the Western Man,

> 'London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down'.

But he does not want us to be alarmed for the individual can still set his lands in order; at any rate, the possibility is there: shall I at least set my lands in order? To this he brings the sanction of the East, where the sage, a mendicant having nothing else to give, but full of compassion for all living creatures, gives his own life, his very backbone, a weapon to smite the clouds with and cause rain for the good of man and beast. Christ has done it before; and before him, in the pagan world Osiris has given his body so that the grain may sprout, grow into a plant and nourish mankind. And today all these myths are needed to meet the challenge of modern life.

But the use he puts them all to is not that of a philosopher or a moralist but a poet, a supremely great poet.

Such is the integrity of the poet that his mind moves between doubt and acceptance by way of exploration and the struggle itself becomes the subject of what is acknowledgedly his greatest poem: *The Four Quartets*. In these poems, as Mr Blackmur tells us, Eliot spills blood for ink and while they live they redeem the time. He goes back to the Greek philosophers who pursued the dialectical method of arriving at the truth by negation of the false. There

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

are at least three dramatic struggles running through these poems: struggle with time: the struggle of the fortune-teller and the saint; and finally the struggle with language. All these are part of a struggle to get at reality. That is why as we read the poem depicting these struggles we find ourselves struggling too. It becomes our struggle in a very personal, intimate, way.

Now the only other American poet who shares a major concern for getting at the reality in modern idiom is Wallace Stevens. Frost is too big a factor to be ignored in any such consideration as the present, but he will not form part of the present discussion because in the first place though Frost lived for sixty years (he died only last year) of the present century he doesn't show a specifically modern sensibility—after all a poet is and ought to be at the most conscious point of the race in his time—not because Eliot or someone else has said so but it must really be so for living men. Frost no doubt shows a highly evolved consciousness but has no awareness of his age in any special way. We must remember he said that all ages shine alike with equal darkness, 'yours as dark as mine' and so one age is like another to the soul. Donne and Emily Dickinson, to take only two poets, must have thought so too but then one is unmistakably early 17th century and the other is clearly late 19th century thus exemplifying Eliot's remark that art never changes but the material of art always does.

What Frost does is that he deliberately ignores New York, 'skirts the problem of the mills and of the new immigration of population', builds a log cabin on a farm in New England, and lives there in the lap of nature writing poetry as 'a momentary stay against confusion'. In doing so he could very well have lived in the last century either contemporaneously with Emerson or a little later. For there is nothing in his language or cadence or imagery or even in the so called content which marks him out as a 20th century poet. He is, any way, in the Emersonian tradition accepting the facts of life, accepting with wise passiveness his own sense of incompleteness but not raving about it. For he has been 'one acquainted with the night' and in any case has 'only a lover's quarrel with the world'. His general pattern is to observe a human situation, force an issue out of it and unexpectedly flash the universal through. Quite satisfying so far as the solution goes, but there is little tension and no deep involvement for the reader in the poet's experience as such.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Wallace Stevens is a very different poet. He is of this earth and of this age. Though Eliot and Stevens work in different modes, Stevens acknowledges his debt to Eliot in very clear terms: 'At one time or another I have been under some great teachers but I have had only two Masters, and one of them is T. S. Eliot. My personal acquaintance with Eliot has been slight. Yet for years I have been trying to learn everything from him that I can use'.

Stevens was older than Eliot by eleven years and while Eliot's first important poem *The Love Song* was published in his 26th year and the collection itself two years later and his most successful and influential poem of the century, *The Waste Land* was published when he was thirty-three, Stevens' first collection, *Harmonium* appeared in his 44th year and in spite of the fact that Alfred Knof brought it out, hardly a hundred copies are said to have been sold and few people took notice of it any way. Even to this day hardly two or three books have been written about his poetry and these, only monographs. Why? He is in the first place a difficult poet, the 'lone wolf of American poetry', 'a most inappropriate man in a most unpropitious place'. He is to blame too: he finds fault with a poet X as his poems 'do not make the visible a little hard to see'. His own poetry is characterised by 'flawed words and stubborn sounds' (R. P. Blackmur lists them and writes two pages on one of those words) and his language ranges from, in his own words, 'the vulgate' to 'the imagination's Latin'. But then we have seen that is exactly what Eliot did. More, he loaded every line with allusions from all the world's literatures. He had himself to furnish the notes for the understanding of his *Waste Land*. Then, Donne is difficult; Hopkins is difficult and even some of Shakespeare is difficult but so much work has been done on them and we have become familiar with their verse. Not so with Stevens. His poetry at first repels us but by constant reading, it seems to yield.

The question is: what meaning does it yield? After all he tells us that he would see the world as the 'stiffest realist' sees it. He has seen the beauties of nature and the ugliness of the human world: the clanking mechanism of machine within machine within machine and tries to relate things as they are to things as they should be by means of a colouring of the imagination. Now how should things *be*? It is here that we find in Stevens a point of violent departure from Eliot. While to Eliot civilization

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

may not endure without religion and religion is the central point of reference in all his poetry, Stevens deplores neither the loss of traditional value, nor the absence of religious faith in modern man. Even while Eliot is writing about the New Hampshire landscapes he warns us, 'Gently dip, but not too deep'. And asks us to:

> Seek only there
> Where the grey light meets the green air
> The hermit's chapel, the pilgrim's prayer.

Stevens takes note of the loss of the world of nightingales, Jehovah and the great sea-worm all right, but there is no regret, no nostalgia. Not merely of traditional values, but even of landscape he says:

> The sustenance of the wilderness
> Does not sustain us in the metropolis.

And so man should find sustenance in his own mind and senses. In a poem which seems to have the overtones of Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*—

> Sister and mother and divine love
> And of the sisterhood of the living dead
> Most near, most clear and of the clearest
> And of the fragrant mother the most dear
> And queen; and of divine love the day.

he prays:

> Unreal, give back to us what once you gave
> The imagination that we spurned and crave.

While Eliot's poem is addressed to the Virgin, this one is addressed to the one of Fictive Music. While Eliot believed in Original Sin to Stevens even the death of Satan was a tragedy for the imagination and with his death 'there was the death of many blue phenomena'. He tells us quite categorically in his 'Esthetique du Mal' that Imagination, not the Virgin Sister or the Son of Man is the liaison, the blissful liaison between himself and his environment and that is the chief matter of delight for him and not for him alone (*Comedian*). 'Happy rather than holy' is his motto.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

It is imagination that wakens the poet's eye to the 'immense dew of Florida' and brings forth 'the big-finned palm/And green vine angering for life'. We at once see both the spreading dew and the big-finned palm: *our* hunger for life gets an edge thanks to the poet. While they stand out vividly before the mind's eye, the beholder sees all 'the green sides and gold sides of green sides'. And these forms came to the poet as 'flying flames and the flakes of flames'. There is a riot of colour which feasts the eye and makes it 'anger' for life more. It is true he claims that they 'bring forth hymn and hymn'. What these hymns are about he gives no clue but we know they haven't inspired in him thoughts too deep for tears. And Stevens doesn't aim at them either. For to him the poem—the modern poem—must find satisfaction in the act of finding what will suffice. It must,

> Be in finding of satisfaction and may
> Be of a man skating, a woman dancing, a woman
> Combing. The poem of the act of the mind.

Henry James, it is true, studied a woman sitting on the edge of a table and looking at you in a particular way but that resulted in a moral enactment. To Stevens, 'beauty is momentary in the mind', 'but in the flesh it is immortal'. When he speaks of the meeting of the sea and heaven the word 'heaven' raises our expectations but when the sea and heaven rolled as one all that happens is from the two 'come fresh transfigurings of freshest blue'. To him the soul itself is a compound of the external world. 'I am what is around me'. How different this is from Coleridge's 'We receive but what we give/And in our minds alone does nature live'.

In his well-known poem 'Sunday Morning' the day starts quite complacently for the aristocratic lady with late coffee and oranges in a sunny chair and the green freedom—all these mingle to dissipate the holy hush of ancient sacrifice—of the death of Christ. But the poet faces the question all right:

> Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
> What is divinity if it can come
> Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
> Shall she not find in comforts of the sun
> In any calm or beauty of the earth
> Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

But the beautiful things of the earth will be gone. The birds and their sweet questionings, the visionary South and the cloudy palm—return no more. If so where then is paradise?

And so she feels the need of some 'imperishable bliss'. And she hears a ring of men chanting hymns to the Sun 'Not as a god but as a god might be' Naked among them, like a savage source, they chant from their blood and it reaches the sky. She hears a voice which says that 'The Tomb in Palestine is not the porch of spirits lingering'. 'It is the grave of Jesus, where he lay'. So it is a grave like any other grave and there is no special sanctity attached to it.

We live in an old chaos of the Sun. At evening, all beautiful things sink

'Downwards to darkness on extended wings'

The poem recalls to us, by way of contrast those two magnificent sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins: *The Windhover* and *Spelt from Sybil's Leaves* in both of which the poet admires the beautiful things of the earth, the 'pied beauty'.

> I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
> dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn drawn
> Falcon, in his riding.

He admires the way the bird winged in his ecstasy and how he rebuffed the big wind; how his own heart in hiding sighed for a bird, the achieve of, the mastery of the thing. But in the second half when the bird comes down from a horror of height and crashes on earth the fire that broke from it was 'a billion times told lovelier; oh my chevalier'. And the valuation follows: 'Brute beauty, valour and act, pride, plume here buckle'. It is the act of sacrifice that is a billion times lovelier than that brute beauty. And similarly in the other poem:

> Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable,
> Vaulty, voluminous . . . Stupendous
> Evening strains to be time's vast,
> Womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all night.

He bathes in the beauty of earthly things and rejoices in them. But that beauty will be wound up with the night. Our brief, colourful life like the gay day comes to an end, has to come to an

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

end. Our evening is over us, our night, whelms, whelms and will end us. And then only two things matter—black, white; right, wrong; only these two count;

> Our tale, O our oracle
> Let life, waned, ah let life wind
> Off her once skeined, stained, veined variety!
> upon, all on two spools; part, pen, pack.

All this moral valuation we miss in Stevens. Again, while Vaughan, the 17th century metaphysical poet speaks of man's original home in nostalgic terms and wants to go back to the place, where he 'shined' in his angel infancy and while Wordsworth knows that trailing clouds of glory do we come from God who is our home, to Stevens it is just the reverse; He says:

> The spaciousness and light
> In which the body walks and is deceived
> Falls from that fatal and that barer sky
> And this the spirit sees and is aggrieved.

It is the beauty of Nature as he perceives it and captures it in concrete terms which is the envy of the spirit. Consider lastly his short poem *The Red Fern*, which reinforces this impression:

The large-leaved day opens out to the poet, the unfamiliar fern in this familiar spot, pushing and pushing red after red. The spacious day reveals the large-leaved fern; the familiar sets off the unfamiliar and the sheer abundance of it fills the eye and the poet's verbal insistence in 'pushing and pushing red after red' brings it home to us in very vivid terms.

Then he speaks of the doubles of this fern in the clouds. But they are less firm than the parent trunk. In the very act of denying the illusion he is affirming reality. And the sharp colour contrast of the grey cloud above and the flame below helps the realization in very sensuous terms. Almost Keatsian in its richness. It is like Marvell's 'Green thoughts in a green shade' and Herrick's Daffodils, those fair pledges of a fruitful tree where the poet has a chance of dwelling on the transience of life, evanescence of things generally and of indulging a mood and investing the natural object with a vision of life. Here the analogy must stop, though it is tempting to compare Stevens with that 'high

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

priest of nature' in English poetry. To Wordsworth, the yellow primrose by the riverside is not a mere primrose; and even the meanest flower that blows induces in him thoughts too deep for tears; and the daffodils, that jocund company, stand him in good stead when in the midst of the bustle of city life in his vacant or in pensive mood, he remembers them and his own heart dances with the daffodils. But there is no proof in the poem that the poet imbibed all their splendour. One wonders if, instead of daffodils, there had been an acre of luscious green Wordsworth would not have considered it 'the bliss of solitude'. For the particular quality of the flower, which makes a daffodil, daffodil, what Hopkins later calls *inscape*, wasn't realized by Wordsworth. When Burns says, 'My luv is like a red, red rose' the rose must obviously have meant a lot more to Burns though he is only poet of the poor 'Mousie' and 'Jo Anderson my Joe' than to Wordsworth the high-priest of Nature. Similarly to Stevens it is the distinctive power of the Red Fern—its large leaf, its 'red after red', its 'parent trunk', its 'paternal flame', its 'dazzling, bulging, bright core', the furiously burning 'father fire'—it is these that 'waken the sleepy eye and pierce the physical fix of things'. The experience is first-hand, authentic and immediately convincing. Not merely that: even the unity of the sun, land and cloud is realised through the fern. There is a moral too, not appended to the poem but belonging to it organically:

'Infant, it is enough to speak of what you see'.

And the word 'infant' coming after 'father-fire' in the previous line makes for humility and reverence in the presence of nature. But it is the mind of man, the eye of imagination or what he calls imagination's mercies that achieve this. Imagination's mercies bring him nearer to the beatitude of his own conception but not as Dante or Shakespeare or as Wordsworth or as Eliot might have seen it. For to him the greatest poverty is not spiritual but vital —not to be in the physical world, not to heed the power of the moment, the endless flux of life. In that undeservedly famous poem 'The Emperor of Ice-cream' he affirms his faith in the flux of life in the refrain 'The only Emperor is the Emperor of Ice-cream'. The Buddha tried to achieve Nirvana from the flux of life; W. B. Yeats felt that once out of nature he would never take bodily form in any natural thing and so went to the holy city

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

of Byzantium; Mr Eliot strives to seek redemption from the flux of life in poem after poem culminating in the *Four Quartets*. But to Stevens Heaven is considered as a Tomb and in any case he thinks that the poems of heaven and hell have been written but the poems of the earth have yet to be written. He writes the poems of the earth all right and thanks to him, the loveliness of the earth is more lovely once again; the sea itself flows into our veins, the sun gives comfort out of tenderness or grief; and we are clothed with the blue of the sky and crowned with the glory of the stars. Thanks to him, our perceptions have sharpened and our awareness of life's manifold beauty has increased and we have learnt that to deny life is evil. But in his abundant zest for life he has taken pitifully small notice of the crisis of the spirit in man thus coming perilously close to the hedonist doctrine. He may be the most finished poet of our age but by no means a great poet. With all his urbanity, elegance and leisurely grace he falls short of greatness: we miss in him Eliot's spiritual and moral centrality. But both together have helped—along with Pound and Frost—to make this a great age of Poetry.

A word or two will be said in passing, not about the many minor poets of the age, but about Beatnik poetry. The Beats of San Francisco, those angry (no longer angry) young men like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, who claim to be at the source of the living popular culture of America swear by Thoreau and Whitman and accuse T. S. Eliot of having arrested the growth of poetry by at least 30 years. They think that Carlos Williams rather than T. S. Eliot to be a more significant poet. The Beats claim theirs is not the kind of poetry that has dominated anthologies and respectable periodicals. They love to call it street poetry, that is, they have been endeavouring to get poetry back to the street where it once was, out of the cliques, college rooms and even out of the printed page. They aim at resocialization of poetry by taking it away from paleskins like Eliot. Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* is representative of Beat poetry, and it is not of much consequence.

But the SF movement is not another literary movement like the American Transcendentalism or the Southern Flowering both of which enlisted some of the finest men but its work is quite interesting, amusing, and hardly significant. It is most unlikely that it will endure and that is as it should be. That leaves the field completely free for Mr Eliot to dominate.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

THE WELL-WROUGHT JAR OF WALLACE STEVENS

D. V. K. RAGHAVACHARYULU

ALTHOUGH *Anecdote of the Jar* is frequently anthologized, it has not received the critical attention it richly deserves both as a perfectly constructed poem in itself and also as an excellent introduction to Wallace Stevens' poetics of the imagination. The poem builds up for itself a sensitively crystallized plot around the elvish transformations of experience and consciousness as they respond alternatingly to the intermingling currents of reality and imagination. As the symbolic action of the poem moves towards its final epiphany, we become aware of a general enhancement of life which is kept open constantly to the 'beauty of inflections' and the 'beauty in innuendos' as the structure of reality and the texture of the Supreme Fiction of Order continuously achieve new blends and new alchemies in relation to each other on several levels. The actual is amorphous, shapeless and indifferent and neutral until it is subjected to, and engaged in, the operations and influences of the gradations and locutions of a steadily evolving sensibility. It reaches the level of the real in proportion to the resourcefulness of the imagination in imparting to it a sense of form, identity and locality.

The objective world of nature, with its facts, processes and vitalities, is full of unsurmised surprises, and lies in wait for its generic coherence which must be brought about by the subjective frame of the human consciousness acting through imagination, awareness and contemplation. The world of imagination, too, has its own secret ways of surprising reality at its sources, and of coming into an effective possession of the law-determined abstractions and intractable essences of the objective world. If Nature teases man with the giddiness of the Infinite and the Eternal, the human mind too is perpetually busy enticing the natural into the spiralling patterns of its own fertile selfhood. If reality is the prerogative of Nature, form is the privilege of Man. Reality renews itself in the field of imagination, and imagination transfigures itself in the unfolding enjambments of reality.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

The mind is the dragnet into which the universe shall yield up its moulds of beauty, its clues of purpose, its archetypes of meaning. Between the cyclorama of reality and the curtain-line of imagination, there lies, inviting our comprehension, the enchanted spot-light of consciousness in which facts, and values, the self and the world, change and duration, immanence and transcendence fuse with, and melt into one another. The result is a singular augmentation of the concreteness of the felt life in the union of the nuances and contradictions of experience. As Stevens says elsewhere,

> The casual is not
> Enough. The freshness of transformation is
> The freshness of a world. It is not our own,
> It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves.

Anecdote of the Jar embodies in the movement of its structural patterns and organic rhythms this dramatic interplay of the two potent kingdoms of force, reality and imagination, symbolized as they are by the Wilderness and the Jar. The background of the plot of the poem implies the existence, in an autonomous state of these realms of essence, without a universe of discourse. The initial action described by the opening line:

> I placed a jar in Tennessee

is a mythic initiation and determination of the Self (be it that of God, Man, or Poet), but it soon is caught up in the indeterminacy of the objective world set in motion by the intrusive momentum of the personal, which compels the Universe-as-Wasteland into a disturbing fertility of new processes which in their turn conjure up new adjustments, new alignments and new posturings in relation to steadily emerging distances, approximations, adjacences and amplitudes discovered by a specific set of events superimposed on the general chances of reality, on the generic modes of nature. The roundness of the jar becomes the co-efficient of the luminous circles of the resultant ambience of all things in a state of change and transformation. The slovenly, reticent, hitherto inert Tennessee Wilderness assumes an activity of energy aroused by a distant, aloof centre of will which then recedes into passive percipience until it is engulfed by the tidings of liberated possibility.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

In the second stanza, the Wilderness predicates the order of change as well as the change of order. Imagination, which was once master, now comes under the control of reality. Nature now imitates Art through the intervention of the Self, which in its turn becomes a spectator of the consequence of its own action, as unpatterned actuality is enabled to thaw itself into an excited revelation of form. The Wilderness is no longer wild; it has blossomed into explosive individuality. It envelops the Jar, and in its own transformation, transfigures the Jar too. The tangential worlds of reality and imagination have established a reciprocity between themselves, have lost their erstwhile autonomy to a new-found condominium of power, and have come to be set together into a single focus of force, the actualization of a gestalt of form. The Jar is now round upon the ground, not upon a hill where it had once lorded over reality, because the Wilderness in rising up to it, has conquered its own barbaric sloth, and in attaining the peak of the surrounding Hill has become level with its rivalling eminence. Reality and imagination have become coeval: the distance between them has become abridged, or rather their achieved unity in the identity of the Jar and the Wilderness has come to constitute a new ritual distance between the new reality that has come into existence and the ever-elusive ancient reality of the separating air and sky and heaven. The Jar has become in the changed situation the tapering finger of the Wilderness, a gleaming Gothic spire of a new, star-aspiring reality, pointing restlessly, challengingly, beckoningly to the mysteries that must yet be descried in heady Olympus. And hence it is that the Jar is now

. . . tall and of a port in air.

A new sovereignty of order is hinted at as metaphor and reality merge into symbol, and as the symbol itself passes into the empyrean of Truth, the Jar (of which the Wilderness has become an organic buttress)

. . . took dominion everywhere.

The third stanza accordingly describes a phase of consciousness in which experience has moved beyond the single and the unique, and has once again established itself in the universal. The Jar is now no jar; it has been so well-wrought out that it has shed its

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

individuating attributes. It has surrendered its personality to the impersonality of truth, and has assumed upon itself the stigmata of colourless omnipresence and toneless omniscience. It is gray and bare. The Supreme Fiction constitutes not a modified, but a metamorphosed Supreme Reality. It is subsumed by a refreshed, enlivened, illumined order of consciousness, of whose essence it is not to be burdened by the quotidian repetition of the actual, and not to be disturbed by the histrionic mutations of the natural, but to strain both the actual and the natural into a happy sanity of contemplative beauty. Analogy fails for there is no distinguishable individuality, even as metaphor fails for there is no characteristic paradox any more. Thus it is that

> It did not give of bird or bush,
> Like nothing else in Tennesee.

The Jar and the Wilderness as symbols may perhaps stand for a number of semantic, metaphysical and ontological conceptualizations. They may be taken to mean any of the proverbial dichotomies in our experience and awareness of the universe: the self and the world, the Species and Evolution, Nature and God, Beauty and Truth, Man and Woman, Reason and Conscience, Time and Eternity, and so on. But it is clear enough from the evidence of the symbolic action in the poem itself, and its dramatized combination of opposites and contingencies, that the main thing is how Stevens makes the interrelationships and the processes fructify themselves into a new integrality of vision. The poem stresses not reality as such, nor imagination as such, but both reality and imagination in the act of composing themselves and in the process of their composing concrete new universals. If reality determines the textures of the actual, imagination determines its structures, and *vice versa*. The civilizing presence of the Jar (Imagination) placed on the Hill (Life) in the midst of the Wilderness (Reality), makes the wilderness grow and mature until it becomes an eager bed of infinite fecundity of forms. The wilderness as the subsoil of possibility lends the jar an endless plasticity of substance out of which new forms may yet rise, and reach up to the level of life. The poem is itself a commentary on the poem, and the poem is significant not because it is, but because it has come to be, a moment arrested out of chaos and returned as an eternal float in solution. The poem in *Anecdote of the Jar* is in every way commensurate with its poetry.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

FORM AND VIEWPOINT IN THE POETRY OF CONRAD AIKEN*

REUEL DENNEY

I

THE work of the American poet Conrad Aiken has been less well-known in India than that of his old Harvard friend T. S. Eliot. The main reason for this is the force and brilliance with which Eliot, immediately after World War I, put himself at the head of a whole poetic and critical generation. Eliot's stardom has blinded some eyes to Aiken's superb innovations in modern poetry and even Eliot's partial debt to him. Over and beyond Aiken's fifty years of high achievement in poetry there is at least one other reason that he should be better known by readers outside of the United States. In 1949 the American critic Lionel Trilling, in a troubled appraisal of his favoured 'liberal imagination', acknowledged that 'The sense of largeness, of cogency, of the transcendence which largeness and cogency can give, the sense of being reached in our secret and primitive minds—this we virtually never get from the writers of the liberal democratic tradition at the present time'. Whether this judgement was or was not meant to be extended over the whole period 1913 to 1949, there are grounds for considering the best of Aiken's work as having provided some of what Trilling said he could not usually find. The purpose of this essay will be to acquaint the reader with Aiken's progress in poetic experiment—the kind of experiment that caused the writer of a recent lead article in the *Times Literary Supplement* to describe Aiken as one who truly thinks poetically.

A question that the Indian reader *might* consider is whether Aiken has helped to preserve a decorative tradition in American poetry and whether this, in turn, has anything at all to do with the 'affinities' that American writers have sometimes found in Asian

* Reuel Denney's work on Aiken was originally undertaken at the suggestion of Allen Tate and will form the basis of his contribution to The University of Minnesota's Pamphlets on American Writers.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

literature. It appears that the chief influences exerted upon American poetic style by Asian sources, since 1913, have been those from Chinese and Japanese poetry, edited by Fenellosa, Pound and others. It appears also that, regardless of the stylistic qualities of those works in the original, the translators and transmitters employed them in part as arguments-by-example for a sparse, Imagistic, concrete-minded, rhymeless and often free-cadenced sort of verse. It was with the help of the Asian literary works that Pound declared war against the sweet and decorated aspects of Edwardian and Georgian poetry. In view of this major trend in influence or 'affinity', is there something significant in Aiken's refusal of it?

His refusal of it is indirectly justified, perhaps, in the sense that Pound and others appear to have understated the formality, the rhyme and even the phonetic character of Chinese verse and its characters. Could it also be said that Aiken was the defender and developer of a verse tradition in English that has affinities with major traditions in Indian poetry? Certainly not all Indian poetry, either in the cultural languages or in Sanskrit, can be called 'decorative'. The verses of religious texts seem to have a pithy and gnomic character that avoids unnecessary elaboration. Yet the westerner may not be wrong in associating a shimmering richness with many Indian texts in translation and therefore cannot help asking whether what seem to him to be similar qualities in Aiken could have an appeal to some Indian readers. Doubtless most modern Indian readers are as much convinced as the author of this paper that the Modernist purification of poetic diction in English that came as a result of the interest taken by Pound and Eliot in what poetry could learn from prose has been mostly to the good. Yet he may also be pleased to observe that Aiken has helped to advance a decorative tradition in English verse just as St. John Perse did in French and Lorca in Spanish. And he may see affinities with Indian poetics that this writer can only suspect and with or without justification, surmise. The question, as has been suggested is one of affinity rather than influence, since there is no clear indication in Aiken's intellectual biography that he ever took a strong interest in any branch of Indian literature ancient or modern.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

II

The reader who is just becoming acquainted with Aiken's work might well begin by reading the following selections from his early, middle and later periods.

Selections from SENLIN (1925)

Senlin: A Biography

I. HIS DARK ORIGINS

1

Senlin sits before us, and we see him.
He smokes his pipe before us, and we hear him.
Is he small, with reddish hair,
Does he light his pipe with a meditative stare,
And a pointed flame reflected in both eyes?
Is he sad and happy and foolish and wise?
Did no one see him enter the doors of the city,
Looking about him at roofs and trees and skies?
'I stepped from a cloud', he says, 'as evening fell;
I walked on the sound of a bell;
I ran with winged heels along a gust;
Or is it true that I laughed and sprang from dust? . . .
Has no one, in a great autumnal forest,
When the wind bares the trees,
Heard the sad horn of Senlin slowly blown?
Has no one, on a mountain in the spring,
Heard Senlin sing?
Perhaps I came along on a snow-white horse—
Riding alone from the deep-starred night.
Perhaps I came on a ship whose sails were music—
Sailing from moon or sun on a river of light'.

He lights his pipe with a pointed flame.
'Yet, there were many autumns before I came,
And many springs. And more will come, long after
There is no horn from me, or song, or laughter.'

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

The city dissolves about us, and its walls
Become an ancient forest. There is no sound
Except where an old twig tires and falls;
Or a lizard among the dead leaves crawls;
Or a flutter is heard in darkness along the ground.

Has Senlin become a forest? Do we walk in Senlin?
Is Senlin the wood we walk in—ourselves —the world?
Senlin! we cry . . . Senlin! again . . . No answer,
Only soft broken echoes backward whirled . . .

Yet we would say: this is no wood at all,
But a small white room with a lamp upon the wall;
And Senlin, before us, pale, with reddish hair,
Lights his pipe with a meditative stare.

II. HIS FUTILE PREOCCUPATIONS

2

It is morning, Senlin says, and in the morning
When the light drips through the shutters like the dew,
I arise, I face the sunrise,
And do the things my fathers learned to do.
Stars in the purple dusk above the rooftops
Pale in a saffron mist and seem to die,
And I myself on a swiftly tilting planet
Stand before a glass and tie my tie.

Vine leaves tap my window,
Dew-drops sing to the garden stones,
The robin chirps in the chinaberry tree
Repeating three clear tones.

Selections from Preludes for Memnon (1931)

II

Two coffees in the Español, the last
Bright drops of golden Barsac in a goblet,
Fig paste and candied nuts . . . Hardy is dead,

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

And James and Conrad dead, and Shakespeare dead,
And old Moore ripens for an obscene grave,
And Yeats for an arid one; and I, and you——
What winding sheet for us, what boards and bricks,
What mummeries, candles, prayers, and pious frauds?
You shall be lapped in Syrian scarlet, woman,
And wear your pearls, and your bright bracelets, too,
Your agate ring, and round your neck shall hang
Your dark blue lapis with its specks of gold.
And I, beside you—ah! but will that be?
For there are dark streams in this dark world, lady,
Gulf Streams and Arctic currents of the soul;
And I may be, before our consummation
Beds us together, cheek by jowl, in earth,
Swept to another shore, where my white bones
Will lie unhonoured, or defiled by gulls.

What dignity can death bestow on us,
Who kiss beneath a streetlamp, or hold hands
Half hidden in a taxi, or replete
With coffee, figs and Barsac make our way
To a dark bedroom in a wormworn house?
The aspidistra guards the door; we enter,
Per aspidisrta—then—*ad astra* —is it?—
And lock ourselves securely in our gloom
And loose ourselves from terror . . . Here's my hand,
The white scar on my thumb, and here's my mouth
To stop your murmur; speechless let us lie,
And think of Hardy, Shakespeare, Yeats and James;
Comfort our panic hearts with magic names;
Stare at the ceiling, where the taxi lamps
Make ghosts of light; and see, beyond this bed.
That other bed in which we will not move;
And, whether joined or separated, will not love.

From Doctors' Row (1942)

Snow falls on the cars in Doctors' Row and hoods the headlights;
snow piles on the brownstone steps, the basement deadlights;
fills up the letters and names and brass degrees

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

on the bright brass plates, and the bright brass holes for keys.
Snow hides, as if on purpose, the rows of bells
which open the doors to separate cells and hells:
to the waiting-rooms, where the famous prepare for headlines,
and humbler citizens for their humbler deadlines.

From A Letter From Li Po (1956)

IX

The winds of doctrine blow both ways at once.
The wetted finger feels the wind each way,
presaging plums from north, and snow from south.
The dust-wind whistles from the eastern sea
to dry the nectarine and parch the mouth.
The west wind from the desert wreathes the rain
too late to fill our wells, but soon enough,
the four-day rain that bears the leaves away.
Song with the wind will change, but is still song
and pierces to the rightness in the wrong
or makes the wrong a rightness, a delight.
Where are the eager guests that yesterday
thronged at the gate? Like leaves, they could not stay,
the winds of doctrine blew their minds away,
and we shall have no loving-cup tonight.
No loving-cup: for not ourselves are here
to entertain us in that outer year
where, so they say, we see the Greater Earth.
The winds of doctrine blow our minds away,
and we are absent till another birth.

III

Early in his work Conrad Aiken wrote the following:

There are houses hanging above the stars
And stars hung under a sea.

These suave, unsettling lines from *Senlin: A Biography* (1918) suggest in miniature much of what was to follow. The world of these verses is no other than the round world on which we live. On the other side of the world, from our point of view,

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

the houses hang above the stars and so do the oceans. The visual logic of man if he tries to extend it very far is turned upside down by the gravitational logic of the globe. 'Can the same be true of all of man's mental life?' Aiken seems to be asking. In that event our thoughts and feelings are subject to fields of force in which fall is flight and flight is fall and high and low are interchangeable. Aiken's work in both verse and prose is concerned with just such circularities and reversibilities and his success with them is the success of all his best writing.

Called by Allen Tate 'one of the new genuine men of letters left', Conrad Aiken was the first child (1889) of New England-bred parents of three children, all sons. His surname testifies to the Scotch blood he shares with his thematic and stylistic ancestor Poe. His birthplace, Savannah, Georgia, was the city in which his Harvard-trained father practised medicine and the family lived in one of those squares whose back-alleys were the background of his exploits with white and Negro boys. Above-ground burial vaults, resting richer Savannahs in masonry split by climbers, struck the first notes of his Savannah experiences with the *macabre*. When Aiken went to Harvard in the fall of 1907 he joined without being at first aware of it one of the most influential groups of writers and intellectuals in the 20th Century. The classes of 1910-15 matriculated T. S. Eliot, John Reed, Walter Lippman E. E. Cummings and Robert Benchley. Since his graduation Aiken has distinguished himself in haunting poetry, prophetic criticism, varied fiction and journalism. Working to please himself, he has earned most of his living by writing alone and has memorialized all this in a remarkable autobiographical essay in human and artistic self-analysis (*Ushant*, 1952).

IV

The young Aiken let himself go on *The Divine Pilgrim*, a long sequence written in the years 1914 to 1920. Swinburne's tone had already been present in *Turns and Movies:* 'After long days of dust we lie and listen/To the silverly woven harmonies of rain'. *The Divine Pilgrim* shows Aiken as the rapt reader of others who preceded him. Poe: 'For seven days my quill I dipt/To wreathe my filigrees of script'. Browning: 'Here's my knife—between my fingers I press it/And into the panic heart.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

. . . Do you still hear the music? Do you still see me?' Wilde: 'Death, among violins and paper roses . . . .' As Blackmur says, the readiness with which Aiken called upon a conventional poetic vocabulary in this early work has remained true of him all his life. At the same time the inventive advances he achieved in these same pieces constitute one of his strongest claims to attention. *Forslin*, Tate, has suggested, 'may be the first poem in English that is simultaneously symphonic and philosophical. In Aiken's blend of the lyric and the narrative, the lyric predominates and is centred on the evocation of a character. Upon the nearly eventless quandary of that central character the reader is invited to project his own sense of episodes that might explain the character and his mood.

V

What kind of literary artist did Aiken wish to be? The first decade of his verse, like Eliot's shows how closely the Harvard *litterateur* had been reading Arthur Symonds' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, but much was added thereafter and Aiken's vitality arises partly from the assurance with which he continues from earlier than Swinburne a luxuriant and decorative tradition in poetry. The best clue is his interest in drawing upon music for suggestions about the forms of poems, an interest centered upon the capacity of music to present simultaneously several different levels of sound and meaning. This pre-occupation with a plurality of voices is directly connected, in turn, with Aiken's leading intuition of human character and circumstances. Once influenced by the early psychoanalytic movement, Aiken sees man as a creature existing in both awareness and unawareness. The voices from the unawareness deserve to be rendered. But how? Aiken's solution is one that has now become conventional but was not always so. He makes these voices carry a symbolic content in which traditional and psychoanalytic motifs are blended. The manner is essentially what the composer would call chromatic; and although Aiken himself makes rich reference to the French Symbolists he strove to understand them far less than some others of his poetic generation and his own style is that of Impressionism, Impressionism strongly tinged with that still older school that the French called Parnassian. These predilections of his led him

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

to produce poems whose strength lies in their brilliant and fulsome evocation of certain human temperaments.

Aiken himself once employed the word 'chorus' in connection with his method. A character in the early poems is conceived as generating a whole band of voices from different motivational levels and temporal sectors of the psyche and the themes carried by these voices are elaborated in a deliberated sequence somewhat in the way the composer undertakes the expansion and development of themes in a symphony or perhaps more properly a tone-poem. While it is true that Aiken's poems do have sections in which the massed voices of many selves of the selfsame character seem to sing together in the same lines at the same time, the word 'chorus' is not entirely satisfactory. The reason is that the various aspects of one of his characters also are rendered in a manner quite different from that of the chorus; it is a regular occurrence for them to appear in separate successive solos. The method is operatic or oratoric rather than choral, and might as well be called so.

While Aiken referred to a 'chorus' in the sense of a musical rather than a dramaturgical device, there is a sense in which he could have quite properly evoked the latter meaning. A characteristic of a chorus in a Greek play was that it could take a standpoint different from that of both the protagonists and the audience, serving as a narrative and meditative 'we' disjoined from both. One of the advantages of this position was that the chorus could be made, among other things, to share information and feeling with the audience that were not made available to the protagonists, thus generating one type of dramatic irony. There is a sense in which the voices emanating from the unawareness of the agent in a poem by Aiken serve similar purposes. The principal resemblance lies in the fact that the voices from the unawareness distribute to the reader a certain knowledge of the agent himself. This produces a literary effect that we might as well label, for lack of a better term, 'psychoanalytic irony'.

VI

Aiken's own first acquaintance with the doctrines of Freud was made while he was still an undergraduate at Harvard about 1909, three years before Freud delivered the now-famous lectures

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

at Clark University which were among his most important steps towards fame in the United States. From almost the beginning Aiken was regarded as an accomplished hanger-on of the movement, especially in the conversational games of 'Latent Motive' and 'Dream Analysis' as practised by devotees upon each other. As a consequence of Freud's admiration for Aiken's novel *Great Circle* it became possible for Aiken, by means of a gift from a friend, to be himself analysed by Freud in Europe. Aiken decided not to undertake the experiment. Many years later, in *Ushant*, he wondered whether this might not have been a mistake. More or less characteristically, he could not make up his mind about the foregone opportunity. It is the quasi-Freudian style of reminiscence in *Ushant* that bids us to concern ourselves again and again with the relations between psychoanalytic doctrine and his life and art.

Senlin is crucial to our analysis of Aiken's poetry and the exegesis of this poem so far is unsatisfactory. Houston Peterson treats the poem as if it could be translated by a symbolic code; yet despite Peterson's interest in Freud's influence on Aiken the code he favours is not Freudian. The female who in this poem is several times dug up, disinterred, or returned to, means to Peterson that Aiken is saying that 'The secret of the self is not to be found in the dust of the past'. This is not only a distracting half-truth but inadequate in other ways. A dream-like poem, like a dream, says the same relatively simple thing over and over again, whatever the disguises and semi-disclosures. The entire synopsis of Aiken's poem can be written in a few words in such a way as to show that in this poem the same thing is happening to Senlin over and over again. Although 'Senlin' can mean in Old French 'little old man' the preoccupations of Senlin suggest that he is in fact in early manhood; *Senlin* is concerned with a raw young man forced by his age and his character into state of intense self-consciousness. One of the results and signs of Senlin's crisis is the confusion between the stages of his life. While still young, he acts old, thus missing his youth. This habit of acting while young and raw as if he were older and more jaded is both the cause and the effect of his problem of incomplete identity. The particular form taken by this crisis is the fear that he may be hurt by women or that this expectation will itself eventuate in his hurting them. Dependent as parts of it are upon

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Prufrock, it is not like Eliot's poem an evocation of a personality but of a character-type and it has a simple and powerful movement of its own.

The basic statement of *Senlin* is this:

A young man keeps walking and climbing, with a feeling that he has been abandoned by the goal that is at the end of the road and the powers that are at the top of the stairs. He is returned incessantly to a situation in which he digs up a young woman.

This can be condensed:

A young man digs up a young woman.

The meaning of *Senlin* can be arrived at by translating its covert content. Growing up as a male is the dying away of the non-male—but also the constant rediscovery of dead traces of this non-maleness. The ascent to the transcending other of a fatherly greater maleness, greater age and wisdom, is unsuccessful or at least difficult. Attempts to ascend to this are always accompanied or followed by rediscoveries of the dead traces of the non-male in the self. Senlin is too much like a woman to be a woman's lover. Yet the non-male in Senlin is not alive and active; it is, in every sense except the recollection of it, dead.

In *Senlin* as in the other *Symphonies* Aiken undertook to study the engulfing vice or virtue of a human temperament from the point of view of new scientific doctrines about such matters. While the literary background of this can be seen extending from Theophratus and Ben Jonson to La Bruyere and Browning, the particular intellectual source of Aiken's *Symphonies* is the interest in characterology handed forward by such men as Wilhelm Dilthey from early 19th Century philosophies to Freud, Spranger, Scheler, Jung, Fromm, and Erikson. It is important to notice that the concern of this line of thought is quite as much with Identity as with Personality and that it involves a preoccupation with ethical problems. Since Aiken is true to this tradition (the moral worth of a character such as that of Senlin is studied in the poem in the light of his perilous preoccupation with himself) it is hard to understand the habit of minimizing the moralist in Aiken.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

VII

Our look at one of Aiken's character studies in symphonic verse has brought us to the point where we can give it the closer attention that it deserves. In the important early long poems that Aiken called 'Symphonies' the unit next largest to the whole is a section headed by a sub-title or in some cases by a Roman numeral that deals pretty much with one emotional tone or one kind of mental episode. This unit is perhaps the 'movement' of the 'symphony'. The next smaller unit of composition is a group of traditional stanzas separated from their surroundings by an Arabic numeral or a verse-paragraph or strophe-like unit, separated by a space from similar units before and after it. The strophe, in turn, is composed of sub-sections fairly tightly unified by rhythm and by co-terminous grammatical units. These sub-sections, written generally in lines of end-stopped character, are frequently enough made up of lines in couple, triple, or quadruple formation, with each succeeding line undertaking to develop by repetition or variation a theme stated in the opening line.

'Things mused upon are, in the mind, like music,
They flow, they have a rhythm, they close and open,
And sweetly return upon themselves in rhyme'.

(*The Jig of Forslin*, I, 7)

'Rain slowly falls in the bitter garden;
It rains: the streets grow dark.
The leaves make a sorrowful sound in the hidden garden;
It rains, and the streets grow cold'.

(*The Charnel Rose*, II, 2)

The crucial smaller unit of Aiken's prosodic and poetic organization possesses an expressive unity claimed not only by *anaphora* and other types of phonic repetition but also by its tendency to form itself around a unified cluster of sensuous impressions. Within this unit Aiken cunningly builds up such variations upon imagery that certain other features of its construction pass unnoticed. Of all the figurative devices that Aiken employs, one of his favourites is the substitution of a sign associated with one

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

sense for a sign associated with another sense: *synesthesia*. Made both famous and programmatic by Baudelaire's sonnet *Correspondences*, this figure has been exploited by Aiken in ways that are particularly his own.

VIII

When Aiken was 33, he had completed the first phase of his work, which ended with the composition of *The Pilgrimage of Festus* and *Priapus and the Pool* in the three years preceding their first publication in 1922. The next period, ending with *Brownstone Eclogues* in 1942, includes all of the novels, most of the short stories, most of the criticism, and the division of the verse into more fully lyric or more fully narrative forms. These years, from age 33 to age 53, historically divided by the first *Collected Poems* (1929) and the shift from the Jazz Age to the Depression, were the years in which Aiken consistently produced and earned in various genres, while in residence in both the United States and England, most of the earnings by which he supplemented his small patrimony in the support of his first marriage (1916: three children) and his second marriage (1936). The greatest success of the lyrics as contrasted with the narrative poems during the period of 1922 to 1942 might be considered a price paid for his interest in fiction at this time.

Aiken's biggest experiments with the narrative poem occurred towards the beginning and after the end of this period, in *John Deth* (1929) and *The Kid* (1947). *John Deth* follows its subtitle, *A Metaphysical Legend*, in being simply too complex. *The Kid* is Aiken's contribution to the 'lyric-epic' tradition that began in the United States with Joel Barlow, continued in Whitman, Crane and Williams and is also represented faintly perhaps in sequences of the later Stevens. In this poem William Blackstone, inexplicable man who was willing to be Boston's first settler, is seen in search of an inner-frontier that is related to but not identified with the physical and national frontier to the westward. The poem owes as much to Owen Wister and Theodore Roosevelt as it does to Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams. Like its congeners, *The Kid* contains wonderfully sustained passages. It concludes with less than the obsessive brilliance of the *Bridge* or the pawky mythography of *Paterson*.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

IX

There is to be found in Aiken as well as in Freud the belief that 'Where Id is, there shall Ego be' —enough of a commitment to a rationalistic hope to leave major aspects of Freud's thought and Aiken's poetry this side of tragedy. Of all the themes that Aiken takes from Freud, he takes the one that is 'non-tragic' in the inherited sense of the word, but painful enough in its human meaning: the quietest life, devoid of tragic incident or suffering, is already the victim of the internalized aggression that, in the form of conscience punishes gratuitously the psyche that it inhabits. From this intuition, Aiken creates a fluent and colourful picturization of man learning to enjoy and realize himself. The process is conceived of as a response to a universal challenge, first in the sense that the ancestral gods are against enjoyment and finally in the sense that enjoyment leads to a need to transcend itself. The art in which Aiken has embodied this view of life is in its luxuriant, repetitive and decorative. It stands over against the sparer poetic line that has won much of the lip-service as well as a little of the practice of some of the most influential poets since Hulme and Pound made their voices felt half a century ago. Aiken has written many lines below his own best level and was thoughtful enough in his *Selected Poems of* 1961 to anthologize himself at his best. His performance in a luxuriant style is not only one of the strongest testaments to the power of his youthful insights but also the preserver of a tradition whose usefulness, we should be glad to say, he has helped to pass on.

NOTE: Two recent and helpful books on Conrad Aiken provide basic bibliographical aids in the study of his life-work: CONRAD AIKEN: A LIFE OF HIS ART, by Jay Martin, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, U.S.A., 1962; and CONRAD AIKEN by Frederick J. Hoffman, Twayne Publishers, New York, 3, New York, U.S.A., 1962. An invaluable edition of *Wake* magazine (Number 11, 1952, New York), edited by Seymour Lawrence, and containing a rich annotated check-list on Conrad Aiken by R. W. Stallman has become very difficult to run down except in larger American university libraries. The bibliography in my future Minnesota booklet will be a sharply skeletonized, selective and introductory affair.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

'THE TOOTH OF WIT' AND THE 'VELVET PAW'

A Study of Wit and Humour in Eliot's Verse

M. K. Naik

'We are baffled,' observes Eliot in his essay on Andrew Marvell[1], 'in the attempt to translate the quality indicated by the dim and antiquated term wit into the equally unsatisfactory nomenclature of our own time.' It is, for Eliot, 'the quality which Marvell had, this modest and certainly impersonal virtue—whether we call it wit or reason or even urbanity'. It is 'not erudition; it is sometimes stifled by erudition, as in much of Milton. It is not cynicism, though it has a kind of toughness which may be confused with erudition because it belongs to an educated mind, rich in generations of experience ... It involves, probably, a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible. Irony or satire are not 'wit', in this sense of the term, for they 'lack wit's internal equilibrium, because their voices are essentially protests against some outside sentimentality or stupidity.'

It is obvious that Eliot here regards the term 'wit' in a rather special, a strictly 'metaphysical' sense. In considering Eliot's poetry however, there is no reason why the connotation of the term 'wit' should be restricted after him, though the influence of the Metaphysical School of Poetry in his early work has now become one of the commonplaces of criticism. In fact, as Prof. H. J. C. Grierson suggests, even in the case of Donne, it would be doing the poet an injustice to consider his wit in a narrow sense; hence, Donne's wit must be considered in its various aspects of 'wit as we understand wit'[2]. In analysing Eliot's wit, therefore, both his own interpretation of the term, and the larger connotation of it as a power revelling in the sudden and coruscating by-play of the intellect, and using a variety of devices for this purpose, have to be taken into consideration.

[1] *Selected Essays*, p. 303.

[2] Introduction to *The Poems of John Donne*, Vol. II, p. xxx.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

The early Eliot manner is specially suited to the sudden sallies of wit, since the attitude of the poet to Prufrock and his prototypes in *Prufrock and other Observations and Poems*, 1920 is one of ironical detachment and satirical observation. The influence of 'Metaphysical wit' is apparent in various ways. It is seen, first, in the use of learned allusion as in the mottos, Greek, French, Italian, and English, appended to many of these early poems. Many of these mottos imply an ironical contrast between the modern age and some by-gone age, as in *Portrait of a Lady* (Renaissance and the modern age) or *Sweeney Among the Nightingales* (Hellenism and 'modernism'). The occasional use of Latinisd diction as in *Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service* (e.g. 'The sapient sutlers of the Lord' are 'polyphiloprogenitive'; 'the young are . . . pustular' and clutch 'piaculative pence') is also reminiscent of Metaphysical erudition. Three lines from *Lines to a Duck in the Park* (*Five Finger Exercises*) are partially an echo of Marvell's observation—

> Then Worms shall try
> The long preserv'd Virginity (*To His Coy Mistress*)

which in Eliot becomes—

> For I know, and so should you
> That soon the enquiring worm shall try
> Our well-preserved complacency.

The pre-occupation with death here is also reminiscent of the Jacobean age which too 'was much possessed by death'. The effective use of the witty homely image which startles by its unexpected aptness, as in

> I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker.
> (*Prufrock*)

is in the manner of the Donne of 'Busy old Fool, unruly sun'. Similarly, the hero's dreams of the future, in *A Cooking Egg* are in the spirit of Donne's *Will*.

The wit of Eliot's early poems shows the French influence at work, also that of Laforgue and the French Symbolists. Even like Laforgue's, Eliot's early wit employs a variety of devices.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

There are telling phrases which shock us agreeably by their aptness and point—as, for instance, 'the damp souls of housemaids' (*Morning at the Window*) and 'until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill' (*Hysteria*); there is the useful trick of the sudden anti-climax used so effectively in *Prufrock* and in *Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar* where in the line—

She entertains Sir Ferdinand

the romantic overtones in the name 'Sir Ferdinand' are suddenly rendered cacophonous by the first word in the line that follows. —'Klein' which super-imposes the vision of a Shylock on that of the hero of *The Tempest*.

Apt and intelligent parody is another such device, as in 'This oval O cropped out with teeth' (*Sweeney Erect*), and,

Pollicle dogs and cats all must
Jellicle cats and dogs all must
Like undertakers, come to dust.

(*Lines to a Yorkshire Terrier: Five-Finger Exercises*)

The irony and satire of the early poems are lively and brilliant, and there is a certain lightness of touch about them which gets lost in the maturer Eliot. The pure fun of

The lengthened shadow of a man
Is history, said Emerson
Who had not seen the silhouette
Of Sweeney straddled in the sun—

becomes impossible for the later Eliot.

Eliot's vision has broadened and deepened in the *The Waste Land*, and a corresponding change is noticeable in the character of his wit. It has lost none of its earlier brilliance. There is the same power of forging the striking phrase as in 'Belladona.... The lady of situations'; the same use of sudden anti-climax as in the 'violet hour' with its religious overtones being suddenly made out to be the hour when

... the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

But the wit of *The Waste Land* is no longer merely content with grazing the skin; it must pierce and wound. Thus, the parodies of Spenser and Goldsmith in *The Fire Sermon* have both a sharper edge and deeper significance than the parodies in the earlier poems. The parody of Dante in 'Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew/Undid me' carries in it undertones too deep for mere fun. It is equally significant that the whole of the latter half of *The Waste Land* is entirely serious in tone and is unrelieved by any sparkle of wit. The 'Death by Water' in section IV is also the death of Wit. But it is not actual death—only a long hibernation into which Eliot's wit goes for a time, until it emerges once again, sometime later.

The darkest hour before the dawn of Spiritual awakening is represented in *The Hollow Men*. Like hope and certitude, wit too is exiled from the Cactus land of the 'stuffed men'. It returns in *Ash Wednesday*, but it has now lost both its variety and its edge. One reason for this is the new mood of humility and compassion for the sinners which makes the ironic aloofness of the early poems as well as the bitter satire of *The Waste Land* impossible. Wit cannot thrive where the urge is to 'Pray for those who chose and oppose'. The influence of religious mystics, on the other hand, now makes the poet's wit run in the grooves of mystic paradox, as in the description of the 'Lady of Silences' in *Ash Wednesday* as

> Calm and distressed
> Torn and most whole.

The play upon 'word' and 'world' in the opening lines of section V of the poem is also in the same tradition. The delicate lyricism of parts of *Ash Wednesday* likewise shows a new up-surge of feeling to which the by-play of wit in the usual sense of the term is not too congenial.

The Poet's ship has finally reached port in *The Four Quartets*. With the assurance which the approach to a positive philosophy of life has brought comes a partial return to the wit of the early period—lively irony and witty phrase, though these do not have the freshness of the wit of *Prufrock* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. In this respect, the description of the emptiness of the modern

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

man's life in the amplified image of the Tube Railway as a symbol of modern life with its—

> . . . . Strained time-ridden faces
> Distracted from distraction by distraction

could be fruitfully compared with similar passages in the earlier poems.

It is, however, in its constant use of mystic paradox that the wit of *The Four Quartets* reveals its true character. The Poet's quest for salvation has led him to discover a new meaning, adaptable to the needs of the modern age, in the sayings of the medieval mystics. Some of these paradoxes are adapted in *The Four Quartets* as in the concluding portion of the third section of *East Coker*, beginning with—

> To arrive where you are to get from where you are not,
> You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.

But Eliot's wit in *The Four Quartets* reveals its inventiveness and power in ringing brilliant changes on the traditional paradoxes. Perhaps the finest example of this is the sustained image of the world as a hospital. The image is by no means new, being a stock-in-trade of traditional religious literature, from St. John of the Cross to Sir Thomas Browne, who too 'counted the world' as 'not an inn, but an hospital'. But its elaboration, in terms of modern times, gives it freshness: Christ is the 'Wounded surgeon', with 'bleeding hands'; The Church is the 'dying nurse' in this hospital of Earth 'endowed by the ruined millionaire', Adam. Our only health here is 'the disease', because,

> If we do well, we shall
> Die of the absolute paternal care.

Another fine example of this is the image in section IV of *Little Gidding* in which the traditional perpetual descent of the Dove in tongues of Fire becomes identified with the dive bomber which

> descending breaks the air
> With flame of incandescent terror.

Nevertheless, Eliot's later wit, on the whole, shows much less variety and sparkle, because the 'Metaphysical' and the larger

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

witty manner are now both engulfed by the traditional mystic wit. The old man in Eliot's *Lines for an Old Man* boasts—

> When I lay bare the tooth of wit
> The hissing over the arched tongue
> Is more affectionate than hate
> More bitter than the love of youth,
> And inaccessible by the young.[1]

The reverse process is at work in Eliot. In *The Quartets* the 'tooth of wit' has lost its edge, but that is because the lips are engaged in uttering a prayer for salvation.

How does Eliot's wit compare with that of Donne? Donne's wit obviously exhibits far greater variety, on account of his wider subject-matter, comprising various attitudes to love and life. Donne's wit is therefore in turn mordant and gay, cynical and complimentary, erudite and fantastic. Eliot's wit is much more restricted in scope, restricted as it is in subject-matter—confined in the early phase to a uniformly satirical observation of life, and in the later, to mystic paradoxes. Yet, limited as it is in scope, Eliot's wit belongs to the same school which felt its thought as immediately as 'the odour of a rose'.

Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats is a curious work. It is the Cinderella among Eliot's books, having been neglected by most of his critics who have been too busy dissecting the poet's thought and technique to spare any time for this exercise in Nonsense-verse. The other extreme is represented by Elizabeth Sewell, who, in a very interesting article, '*Lewis Carroll and T. S. Eliot as Nonsense Poets*', maintains that the book 'is not a chance production, the master in a lighter mood. It is integral to the whole body of his work, and a key to his poetry and his problem'[2].

The theme of *Old Possum* is summed up in the following lines from the concluding portion of the book:

> Cats are much like you and me
> And other people whom we find
> Possessed of various types of mind.

[1] *Collected Poems*, p. 153.
[2] *T. S. Eliot: A Symposium for his Seventieth Birthday*, p. 51.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

The poet's fancy plays merrily round this central theme to describe a dozen kinds of cats, all corresponding to diverse human types, belonging to different social milieux. Here are 'Growltiger', the romantic ballad-hero, who is at last made to walk the plank by his inexorable enemies; 'Bustopher Jones: the cat about town', who is a sort of a feline Beau Brummell, with his white spats, his coat of fastidious black, and his well-cut trousers; The Rum Tum Tugger, who seems to be a specimen of The Angry Young 'animal', restless and dissatisfied; Jellicle Cats, who are merry-makers pure and simple; the Puckish mischief-makers, Mungojerrie and Rumpleteazer; Old Deuteronomy, the grand old man of the village; Mr Mistoffelees, 'the original conjuring cat'; Macavity: The Mystery Cat, a Napoleon of Crime; the Great Rumpus Cat, a local hoodlum; Gus: The Theatre Cat, who is proud of having 'acted with Irving' and Tree; Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat without whom the Night Mail would not start; and the one lady among the lot—The Old Gumbie Cat, Jennyanydots, a social worker with indefatigable energy, who spends her life in teaching the mice the value of good food, and in raising a boy-scout troop from among cockroaches.

There is pure fun here, a quality for which Eliot's Muse, busy wrestling with the problem of salvation can have little scope in his major work, except in an isolated instance like the short poem, *How unpleasant to meet Mr Eliot.* The mock-heroic is used to great advantage in *Of the Awful Battle of the Pekes and the Pollicles* and *Growltiger's Last Stand*, where cat-brawls are described in terms of romantic battles. Gus, 'The Theatre Cat' provides an excellent caricature of the veteran actor, who boasts of having played every possible part, and whose complaint is that the younger actors—

> These kittens, they do not get trained
> As we did in the days when Victoria reigned.

The Gumbie Cat's philanthropic activities, like teaching music to the mice or creating a Beetles' Tattoo are a diverting parody of the social Worker's schemes, revealing more zest than wisdom. There are flashes of delightful whimsicality as in Macavity, the Criminal Cat being found 'engaged in doing complicated long division sums', after committing a theft; and the sparkle of

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

wit as in this description of the two feline mischief-makers as—

> They had really a little more reputation than a couple of cats can very well bear.

The felicitous names given to the dozen cats show how zestfully Eliot has entered into the spirit of the nonsense-game. This is also evident in the variety of metres from the ballad-measure to the doggerel, employed with competence in these poems. The Byron-like device of using double rhymes for purposes of the creation of bathos is used to great effect in many places.

The nonsense of *Old Possum* carries in it an undertone of seriousness also. The mystery that the Cat is has been proverbial; Worshipped as divine in ancient lands, the Cat unlike the dog, has always kept its 'secret' from mankind, which has domesticated it, patted it, but has never fully understood it. A suggestion of this 'fearful symmetry' in feline nature is made in the introductory poem, 'The Naming of Cats': A Cat must have, the poet tells us, 'three different names': First, 'the name that the family use daily, a sensible everyday name like Peter or James'; secondly, 'a cat needs a name that's particular'—a name like Quaxo or Bombalurina—names that never belong to more than one cat; and thirdly, every cat has a name 'that no human research can discover': a name which 'THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess!' When you notice a cat in profound meditation, the subject of it is always—

> His ineffable effable
> Effanineffable
> Deep and inscrutable singular name.

There is evidently more in this trinity of names than meets the eye.

The nature and scope of his subject limit Eliot's achievement as a nonsense poet in *Old Possum*. A long and continuous narrative has enabled Lewis Carroll to employ an inverted logic to more brilliant effect as in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. The form of the Limerick, and the unlimited choice of subject-matter which it provides have given Edward Lear far greater scope for the exercise of a frisking fancy. Yet

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Eliot's nonsense is essentially of the same rare vintage as that of these two great exponents of this difficult art.

One is often struck by a lack of human warmth in Eliot. There is little compassion for human frailty in the early and middle phases of his work—nothing but withering contempt for Sweeney and for the Typist girl in *The Waste Land*. (One recollects that in Shakespeare even Caliban is not altogether a lost soul.) In the later Eliot, there is a note of human sympathy struck but it is not deep enough to dispel the possible misgiving that it might only be indifference masquerading as tolerance. *Old Possum* will therefore have a special appeal to the discerning student of Eliot because of its humanity, though it is curious that it is the Cat, notorious for its icy aloofness that should have brought the poet closer to the human heart.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

'ABSALOM, ABSALOM!' BY WILLIAM FAULKNER—AN INTERPRETATION

S. K. NARAIN

FAULKNER emerged as a major American novelist in the thirties which saw the publication of half-a-dozen of his finest novels. But even today Faulkner remains the most controversial literary figure in America. In the last two decades there has been a steady flow of critical writing on him on both sides of the Atlantic. But a greater part of this criticism is wrong-headed and betrays a failure of due appreciation of what Faulkner is trying to do. Critics seem to be disconcerted by his 'needless obscurity', his unusual syntax and usage, his disrupted chronology, his manipulation of points of view—what he calls a 'central consciousness'. Another cause of this hostility is the violence and horror of his themes, and the obsessive and tortured states of mind that he depicted in his characters. Another charge brought against him is that he lacks political awareness or social conscience and that he has exploited cruelty and moral perversions for their own sake. And, finally we must take into account the charge, which has particular relevance to the discussion of *Absalom, Absalom!*, brought against him by Maxwell Geismar, that Faulkner's work belongs to the tradition of 'anti-civilization revolt rising out of modern social evils, nourished by ignorance of their true nature, and which succumbs to malice as their solution.'[1] His central thesis is that Faulkner is committed to the southern past and its moral values and he, therefore, pours forth his malice on the Negro and the Female, whom he uses as scapegoats for the South's defeat, and projects the offspring of these two, the vicious Mulatto, 'as the moronic emperor of the future'.

These charges, it is my contention, can be refuted by a careful study of *Absalom, Absalom!* and by a correct interpretation of its meaning.

Although *The Sound and the Fury* has been universally acclaimed as his masterpiece—it happens incidentally to be the author's own favourite—I consider *Absalom, Absalom!* his most magni-

[1] Maxwell Geismar: *Writers in Crisis.*

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

ficent achievement. It is the most fully realized book where the structure involves a vital and functional relation between the idea and other elements in that structure—plot, style, character etc. Its style is in fact fundamental to the whole meaning of the book.

Absalom, Absalom!, besides, is a pivotal story in Yoknapatawpha stories and it sums up, better than any other novel, the legend of the South as woven out of history, and illuminates the meaning and the idea implicit in that legend—the meaning which is unfolded gradually as each narrator tells the story of Thomas Sutpen whose 'design' is somewhat symbolic of the design of the South itself. And the fatal flaw in that design is the South's inability to treat the Negro as a human equal.

The structure of *Absalom, Absalom!* is of unusual complexity, and the book has a rhetorical intensity and grandeur which baffles the lay reader. But once the pattern has emerged, it is never lost sight of and it grows steadily richer and more meaningful. Its structure is like that of *The Sound and the Fury*. There are four narrators, each one bringing his own perspective to bear on the story of the rise and fall of the Sutpens. Like *The Sound and the Fury*, it is a story of 'blood', of heredity; it is the story of a great house in decay. But the resemblance between the two novels stops here. Quentin Thompson, the suicide of the *The Sound and the Fury*, is not a participant in the major part of the story. The dramatic centre is Sutpen and his great 'design', but Quentin's is the central consciousness through which it is viewed. The rise and fall of Stupens is the history of the South as Quentin understands it. Quentin sees in the fall of the house of Sutpen the whole tragedy of the South, its disintegration and decay, because of the failure of love and the triumph of selfishness and egoism. Quentin's is a tragic vision that was also a historical vision. The story thus becomes a social myth, conceived as a symbolic parallel to the Oedipus-Agamemnon myth. Like *Oedipus Rex*, *Absalom, Absalom!* may be regarded as the expression of a total culture.

The facts of the story, so far as it is possible to disentangle them from the varying accounts of the narrators, may be stated as follows:

The story begins in 1805 with Thomas Sutpen, a backwoodsman, living in a state of primitive communism—what has been

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

called Faulkner's Edenic past, in which there is no class distinction, no sense of property. It antedates the culture of the South. It antedates also racial distinctions. In his teens it is all disrupted, when he is turned away from the door of a big house by a Negro servant who tells him he must never come to the front door again. A chemical change occurs in him; his concept of the world alters. He begins to dream of the future—the form it takes is a pattern which will transform him into a Caesar of Southern aristocracy. He breaks away from his family to realize this dream. A concept of the dynasty is born in him. He travels to the West Indies, marries Eulalia Bon, makes a fortune by marriage, has a son whom he calls Charles the Good. Eventually, he leaves his wife because she is part Negro and therefore will not fit into the design he has conceived. He has by now become a creature of design—design has become fate. It is an abstract design and has no validity except in outline—it preempts human feelings. Miscegenation and white-black relation is the central part of the design that creates war; it is the racial consciousness that creates the consciousness of Quentin Thompson.

Thomas Sutpen re-appears in 1833, this time in Jefferson, and starts to build his empire—the Sutpen Hundred—with the help of twenty negroes and a French architect. Once his mansion is built, he feels that Stupens need respectability. So he marries Ellen Coldfield, daughter of a respectable local merchant. The design now seems to be nearing fruition. He has two children, Henry and Judith, and Clymenstra, born of one of the negro slaves. But the past returns to haunt him in the person of Charles Bon, who has become a friend of Henry and who falls in love with Judith. Charles endangers the design of Thomas. The Civil War intervenes and post-pones the need for decision on Henry's part. By the time he returns after four years, Thomas has lost everything. Henry learns that Charles is his brother and yet he is adjusted to Charles' marriage with Judith. But Thomas has to stop the marriage; so he tells Henry that Charles has also negro blood, which is more unacceptable to Henry than incest. He kills Charles and disappears, and Judith becomes an old maid. Thomas, however, makes two more attempts to restore the family. He proposes to Rosa Coldfield, his wife's sister, that they live together, and offers to marry her if she bears him a male heir—an offer which she indignantly rejects. Then he tries to gain a son

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

through Milly Jones, the daughter of a poor white who has been his retainer. Their child turns out to be a daughter and his design is once again frustrated. Wash Jones kills him in 1869. In 1910 the house burns down—Clymenstra and Henry, they are all gone.

The design of the book is Sophoclean; the drama is played in a historical perspective. The social order of the South is studied in relation to the personal lives of these characters within the framework of the Southern design—a design in which incest is more acceptable than miscegenation. The tragedy of the nation inheres in this situation. The theme and the burden is the design—both racial and personal—in which a socially maintained morality is seen undercutting the deeper personal morality.

This is a story not of moral transgression but a social transgression of human morality. The class distinction is an outrage against the human soul. It is a story also of how the past affects the present and of the ambiguity of human behaviour.

There are four narrators—each of them contributes a different interpretation, even a different version. In a sense, the story is an unfolding of the motivations of the narrators. The story has absorbed to itself their nuances of feeling, their diversity of attitudes. Thus Rosa Coldfield, telling the story to Quentin Thompson on the eve of his departure for Harvard in 1909, views Sutpen as a demon and believes that God has brought defeat to the South because he wished it to be purged of the 'demon'. Her version is distorted—it ignores certain important facts—by her intense loathing for the character of Sutpen who had brought evil into the quiet peaceful world of Jefferson.

The second version is that of Quentin's father who had heard the story from *his* father. His version is more objective; it is grimly ironic. He is in a sense heir to the intellectual bankruptcy of the South—a thoroughly ineffectual character, as we have seen in *The Sound and the Fury*, unable to meet the challenge of the times. He is interested in the story of Sutpen intellectually, but completely misses its significance.

Quentin's version—or rather the Quentin-Shreve version—comes nearest to the meaning of the fable. Their's is an attempt at an imaginative reconstruction of the story, as it has come to them from Rosa Coldfield and Quentin's father. Quentin is more involved. He is the South made immanent in him. He is the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

the victim of Sutpen's 'design'. Shreve is an outsider, wanting to understand the South, trying to piece together Quentin's facts into a meaningful pattern. They come to grips with the crucial question, ignored by the other narrators: what was the reason for Henry's murder of Charles Bon? Was it the fear of incest or the fear of miscegenation?

The different versions overlap, modify and contradict each other, but moving forward, nonetheless, to a gradual unfolding of the various levels of meaning implicit in the story. The progression of its symbolic meaning is like the layers of an onion and invests the story with the quality of rich narrative suspense. It shows at its best Faulkner's method of withheld meaning.

Towards the end of the story, Shreve asks Quentin: 'Why do you hate the South?' And Quentin's reply is an anguished protest. 'I don't hate it', he says, quickly, 'I don't hate it', he said. *I don't hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; 'I don't! I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!' It reveals his mind as tormented by the ambiguity of his attitude which, we may say, is Faulkner's attitude too. It is tormented by Quentin's inability to come to terms with the South and we find a similar ambivalence in Faulkner's own attitude, an attitude torn between fascination and revulsion. He loves the South; he is a part of it; he loves the land and the people; they form the subject of his dreaming. But there is much in the life of the South that is cruel and ugly and there is, in Faulkner's depiction of it, a dim awareness that over it hangs a doom; there is about it all the smell of a decaying corpse.

The tragedy of Sutpen is both personal and historical. He fails because he is obsessed by his fatal design, which he seeks to realise with relentless fury and at the cost of whatever humanity lay repressed within him. And he also symbolises the tragedy and the doom of the South in so far as he refuses to regard the Negro as a human being. In his story inheres the message—that is the nearest Faulkner has ever come to committing himself—that the South can redeem itself only by restoring the Negro to human dignity.

The significance of this fable is not limited to the problem of the South; it reaches out beyond the geographical limits of his 'a postage stamp of native soil'. The issues raised have universal relevance and there is implicit in it all an affirmation of human

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

worth, of human goodness, of which evil is a temporary perversion. Irving Howe has described Faulkner's work as 'a moral fable of which the materials derive from Southern life but the meanings—at Faulkner's best—are quite without geographical reference or limit'[1].

It is a classical tragedy with a highly symbolic action. The atmosphere is dark, violent, grimly ironic. The characters are of large dimension; they are moved by vast elemental forces; they are haunted and pursued unrelentingly by a mysterious past which is none of their making. They cannot comprehend either the past or the present but they only enact the tragedy. Implicit in tragedy, however, is the faith in the ultimate triumph of good. 'If the Greeks saw their heroes as splendid, but terrifying, individuals, defying the Gods, we see them as born in innocence, but already bearing the cross of society's violation of that innocence—its violation of nature. The conditions of Greek culture and our own are different, but the effects of tragedy are similar. The great educating force in a society is its literature and the impact on its individual members, its heroes; and if Emerson was right in saying that the great artists and the great heroes were those who read nature truly and recorded it for posterity, then Faulkner is right too when he says that it is only through man's coming to know nature, as Sam Fathers and Ike Mc Caslin, and Dilsey, and Lena Grove were one with nature, that a regeneration of society can be accomplished.'[2]

The structural complexity of *Absalom, Absalom!* embodies the very meaning of the work. 'Not only does the story exist solely in terms of its various reflections, the whole novel is about the inextricable confusion of fact and fiction, of observation and interpretation, involved in any account of human experience. Or we might say that it is a demonstration of the difficulties of writing history, of the impossibility of defining Truth, of the evolution of a myth, or even of the way in which a simple idea may grow in the hands of an artist into a thing of beauty and grandeur —as perhaps the story of 'Wash' of 1934, which contains the germ of *Absalom, Absalom!* evolved gradually in Faulkner's mind into the major novel of 1936.[3]

[1] Irving Howe: *William Faulkner: A Critical Study*—p. 6.

[2] *Faulkner's 'Light in August': A View of Tragedy:* Ray B. West Jr. Wisconsin Studies, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 11.

[3] *Faulkner:* Michael Millgate, p. 56.

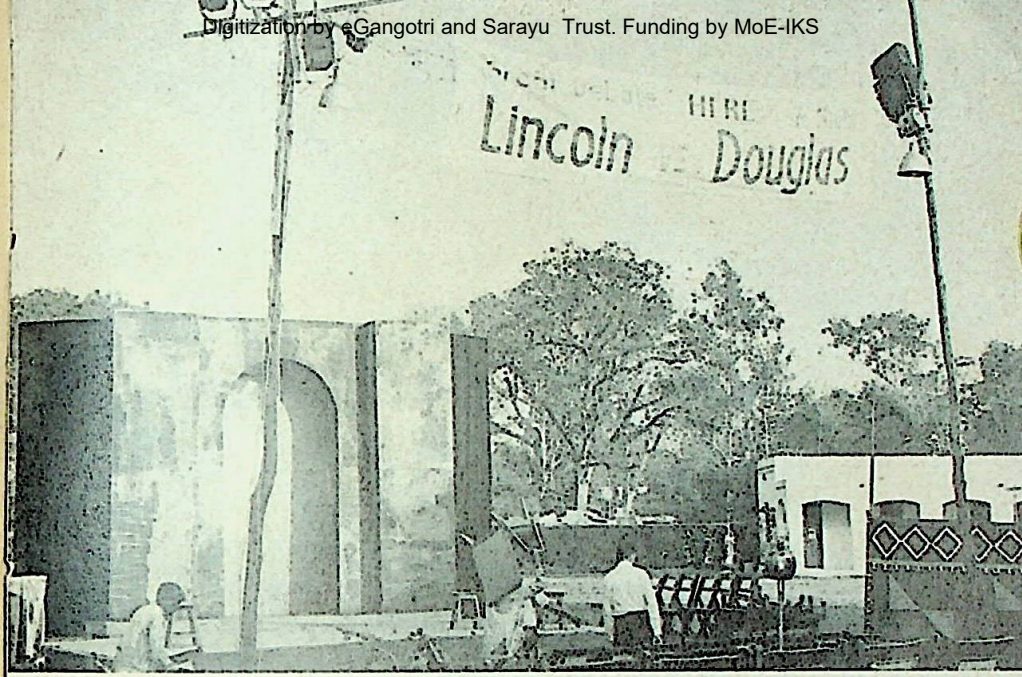
CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

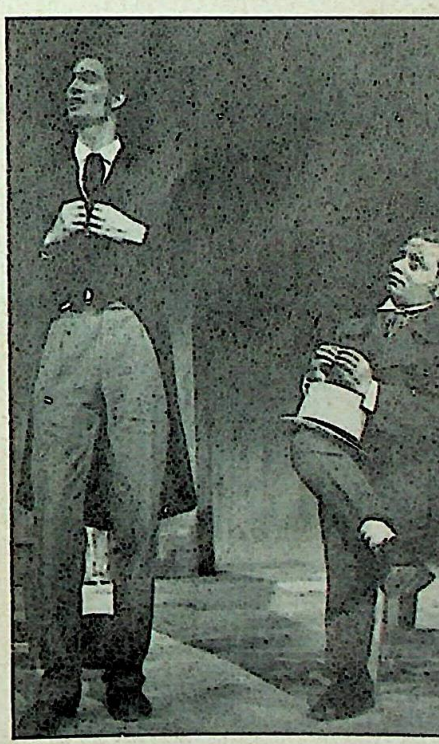
The plot of *Absalom, Absalom*! is a grand, eloquent plot. And the style and rhetoric supports the grand plot. The language he has employed, and which was necessitated by Faulkner's desire to explain and to suggest the ambiguities of human behaviour in all their shades and nuances, is extremely complex and involved. But, at its best, his richly rhetorical prose achieves in this book the lyrical intensity, amplitude, power and splendour of Shakespeare's blank verse.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS



Setting for "Abe Lincoln in Illinois" being prepared for an out door performance in New Delhi

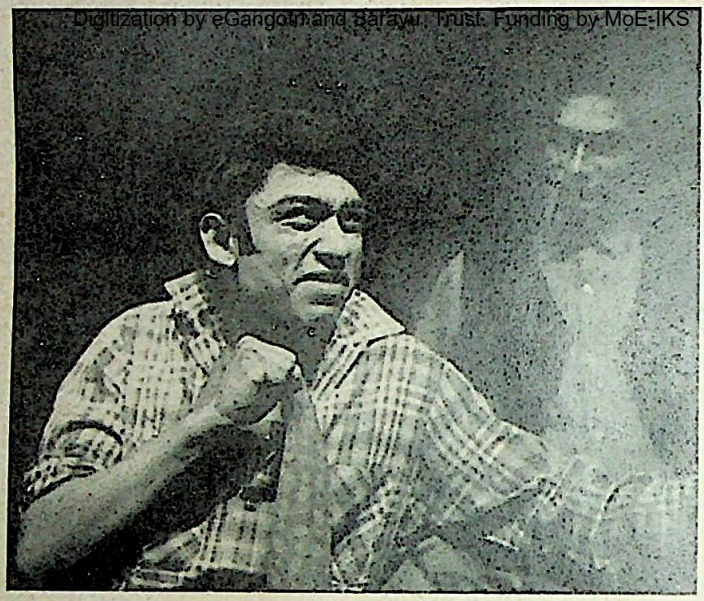


The Lincoln-Douglas debate

Judge Bowling Green: "Now, Ann let m warn you, Mr Edwards is a married man (Sushma Mehra, Shivendra Sinha)

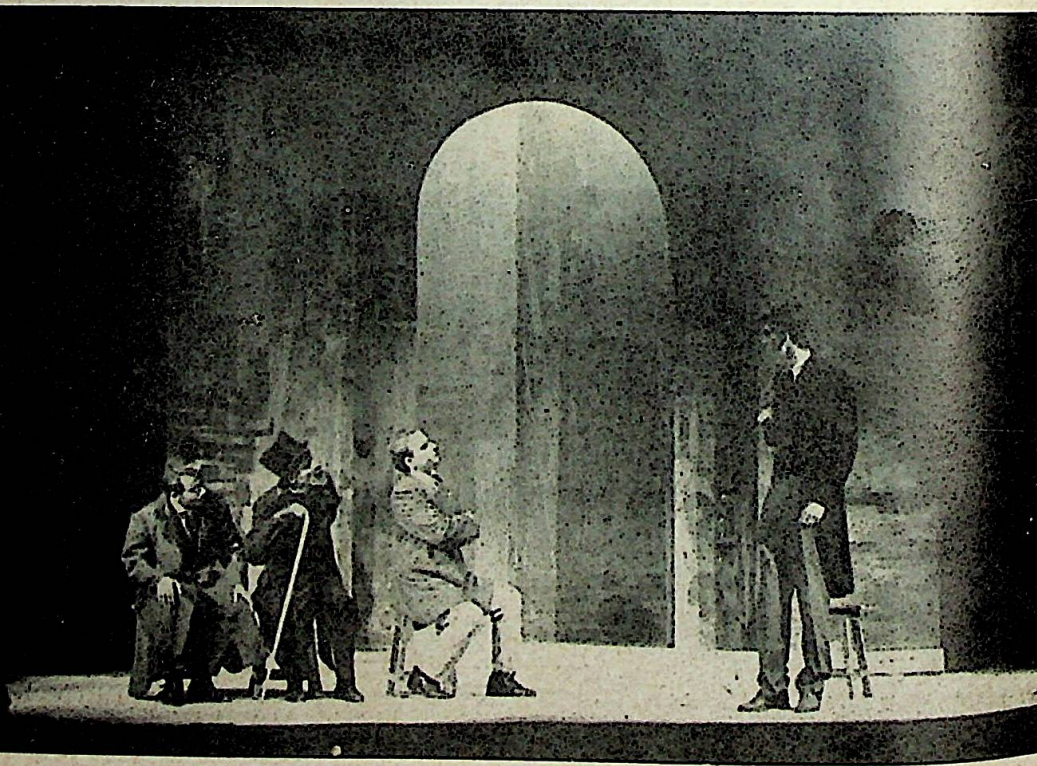
CC-0. In Public Domain. Panini Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS



Jack Armstrong: "I reckon the fourth of July is as good a day as any to whip a politician."
(Mukundan Aiyer, Ram Chopra)

Ram Cho
Lincoln's



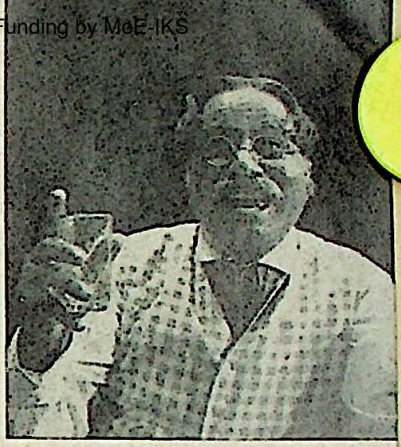
Lincoln: "Yes, I remember the occasion. I replied that I was thankful that labourers in have the right to strike." (*L to R:* Promod Ojha; Nigam Prakash; Shivendra Sinha; Ram

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

ra delivering
rewell speech

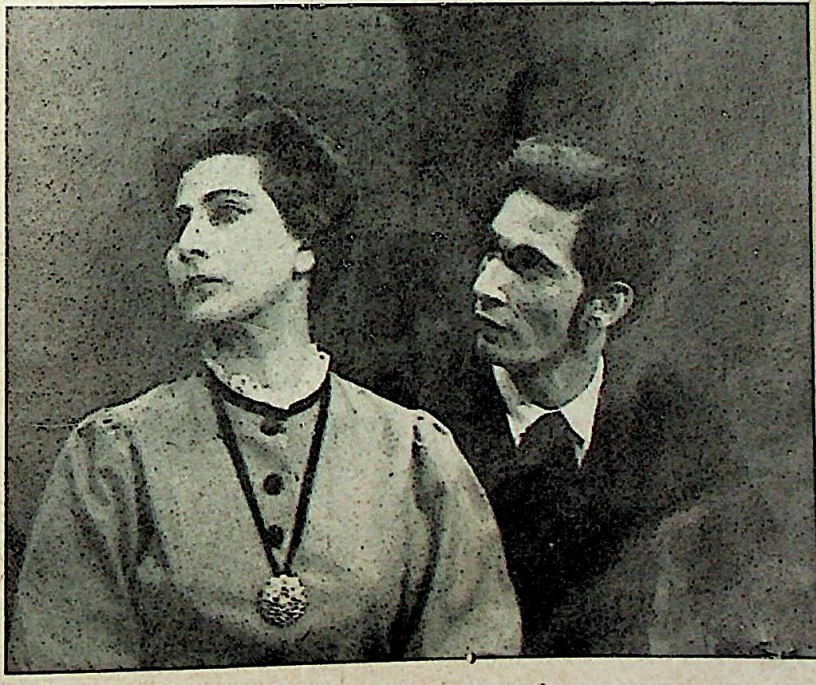
Mary Todd Lincoln played
by Joy Michael



Judge Bowling Green, one of
Lincoln's oldest friends played
by Shivendra Sinha

Photographs by BALWANT GARG'S

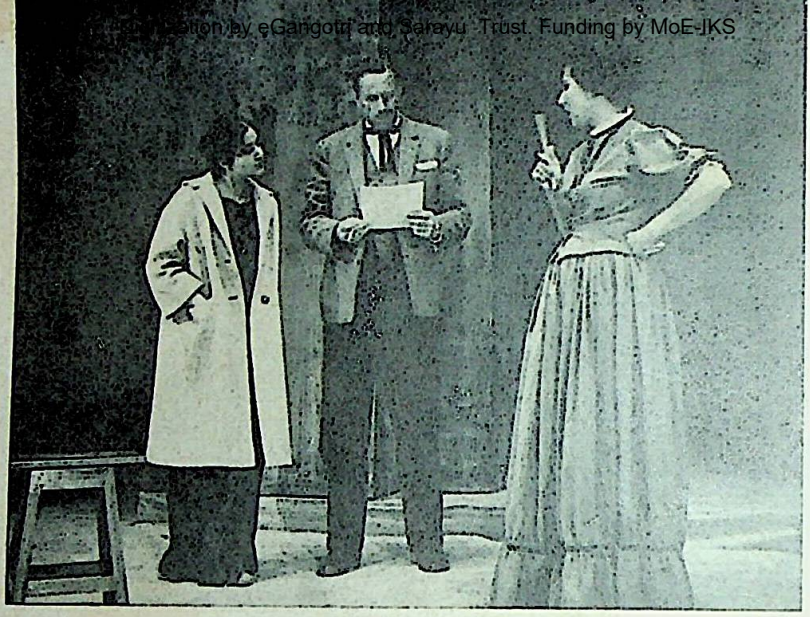
e States
opra)



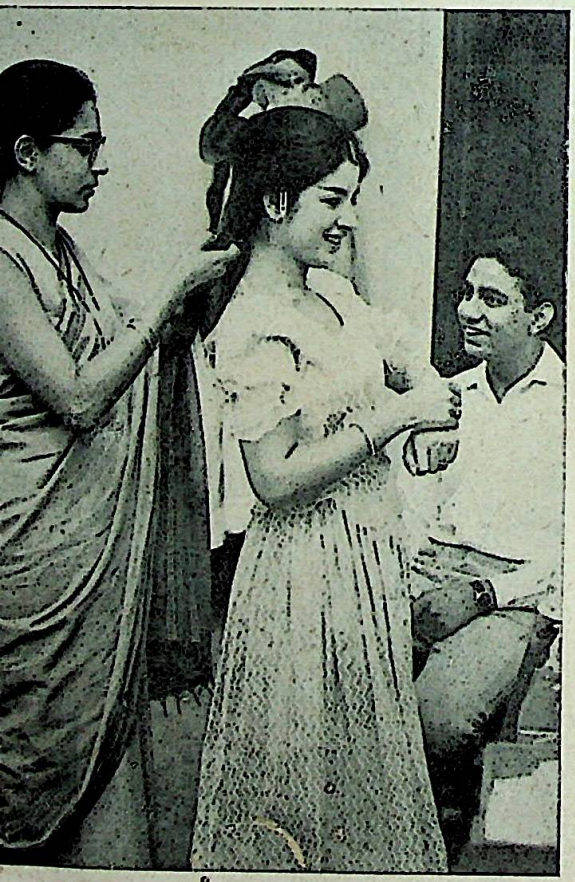
Lincoln: "It is true Mary, you once had faith in me which I was
far from deserving." (Joy Michael, Ram Chopra)

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitized by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS



Mr Noonan with the assistance of Mrs Michael (in costume) tries out a cast replacement



Ashok Srivastava helping Ram Chopra to look more like Lincoln

Mrs Rati Bartholomew assisting Sushma Mehra in preparing to play Ann Rutledge with Mr Oliver Nandkishore's advice

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

PRODUCING 'ABE LINCOLN IN ILLINOIS' FOR UNIVERSITY AUDIENCES IN INDIA

TOM A. NOONAN

THIS was the problem.

It is easier to say simple than do simple.

We wanted to bring the Lincoln so simply and beautifully set forth in Robert Sherwood's 'Abe Lincoln in Illinois' to Indian university audiences with the simplest possible means. We wanted as few trappings as possible, as few things as possible to come between the actors and our audiences.

Structurally, the play is a series of thirteen short one-act plays which cover Lincoln's life chronologically from 1830, when he came to New Salem as a young man, until 1860 when he left Springfield for Washington to begin his presidency.

Most of the words Sherwood gives Lincoln to say are either credited to him by his contemporaries, or were drawn from his writings. The characters and situations are not only artistically true but were developed after exhaustive research. Here is a simple, direct play demanding a simple and direct treatment.

We had the great honour of playing for Mr Elmer Rice, the famous American director and playwright, in New Delhi on April 5, 1963. Mr Rice, who was a very close friend of Robert Sherwood's, and directed the original production of this play on Broadway, told us that the first part of the play Sherwood wrote was the scene on the prairie in which Lincoln encounters his old friend Seth Gale. Seth's determination to follow his dream and move several thousand miles to the far west in a covered wagon helped Lincoln decide to ask Mary Todd again to marry him and to re-enter political life in order to work for the kind of government that would safeguard the interests of men like Gale. The idea for this scene was suggested to Mr Sherwood by an old letter written by Seth Gale, in which he told of the incident and quoted part of the prayer Lincoln said for his son. Sherwood used this scene in the middle of his play as a pivot from which he built up

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

scenes on either side. These scenes too, were drawn from similar incidents said to have formed Lincoln's life.

The whole play has a strong feeling of the times and a remarkable folk quality. The speech, the attitudes credited to the various characters and the incidents alluded to by them, firmly fix the play on the American frontier of the mid-nineteenth century.

In designing and directing the play these characteristics needed to be preserved and projected along with the movingly human Hamlet of democracy Sherwood reveals Lincoln to be.

By very careful casting and a great deal of work on the part of the actors, it was possible for twelve people . . . nine men and three women . . . to create the twenty-four roles required. Three of the characters, Lincoln, his brother-in-law Ninian Edwards, and his life-long friend Josh Speed, appear throughout the play and required the full attention of three individual players. The remaining twenty-one roles were enacted by nine players. Each actress played two roles, while one actor portrayed four characters and another, three. Aside from the advantage of giving us a company which would be practical to transport, this arrangement gave each player a full show to play. Actors only come fully alive when playing; waiting to go on is only a half life. The let down after coming off stage is deeply depressing. In this production few people had time to be depressed for very long. The opportunity to play several different roles before the same audience causes the actor to stretch his reach and deepen his concentration. He must be convincing as several characters; each role acts as a foil for the other.

During rehearsals the actors had become accustomed to sitting along the sides of the stage when they were not playing. Their nearness seemed to encourage those who were acting the scene. This folk-like custom we made part of our production; so when actors were not changing costumes or make-up they sat in rows of chairs on either side of the twenty by twenty foot acting platform back out of the direct beam of the lights. This simple device made for a very strong feeling of interdependence and, I am convinced, greatly heightened the level of ensemble playing of which our company was capable.

One set, a simple twelve foot section of wall, twelve feet high, pierced by a four foot arch placed mid-stage, had to do for all the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

scenes. It was carefully painted to be sufficiently indefinite so that under different lighting a series of moods could be created.

The lighting, although one of our most complicated efforts, required only twelve spotlights in two colours and white, each light on a separate dimmer.

The furniture used for the tavern, office and mansion consisted only of two tables and four stools. Two scenes—the Prairie scene and the scene at the railroad station, were played without any props. Two production elements which defied much simplification were the costuming and the make-up. These, like the acting, needed to be as fully realized as our resources and abilities would allow.

Several times during the run of the play, people interested in play production have complimented us on our simple setting, and have asked if it had any special meaning. Was it in any way symbolic? The first time the question was raised, I answered no, but the question stayed only half answered in my mind. I only knew that this was always the setting I had envisioned for this particular production of the play. Slowly I began to realize that subconsciously I had always felt that the single lone arch had something to do with Lincoln's destiny, that perhaps it was really in the back of my mind a symbol of the political responsibility Lincoln so long avoided accepting, but so fully accepted when he became president. The set's over all squareness, a twenty by twenty foot platform with the twelve by twelve foot wall, two thirds of the way back, had also always been part of my idea of how the play had to be. These elements, the square acting area and the square wall represented for me basic qualities of Lincoln's environment.

In order to keep the play flowing I had always believed that it should be presented without a front stage curtain. Too often these do not work, and even when they do, they cut the audience off from the actors. We had taken several opportunities during the play to have actors enter from the audience in order to build up the feeling in the audience that they were really part of the action being played out before them. So why diminish this feeling by closing a curtain? To designate the end of scenes we simply dimmed out the spotlights.

The number of departures from the way plays are usually done began to worry me. I began to fear that what I was trying

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

to do to keep the production simple might raise so many questions in the audiences' minds that they would mistake this simplicity for arty obtuseness. So we borrowed a device from our folk theatres, a narrator who would introduce the play and make any necessary comments as it progressed. In the American Minstrel show he is called the Interlocutor; he acts not unlike Ranga from the Nautanki operas of Rajasthan or the more common Sutradhar.

To help sustain the moods built by the various short scenes of the play, brief selections of folk music from the period were played before some of the short narratives, which proceeded each scene. These, and two complete songs, the plaintive Kentucky mountain ballad 'I Wonder as I Wander' at the end of the first act and the rousing 'Battle Hymn of the Republic', used at the end of the play contributed much emotionally to the sound of the production.

Approximately 23,000 people in twelve cities saw the forty-five performances of our production of Sherwood's play. The vast majority seemed very pleased while the critics were unfailing in their kindness. Both the cast and their director will be forever grateful to Robert E. Sherwood for having written such a deeply moving, playable drama.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

THE THEMES OF O'NEILL'S 'THE ICEMAN COMETH'

S. NAGARAJAN

IT is rather difficult to make up one's mind about Eugene O'Neill. His friends put him in the company of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and of course, William Shakespeare. His non-friends put him elsewhere. The divergence of critical opinion is extremely sharp, and probably irreconcilable. The case against him is that while his intentions were mountainous—would they were not!—his achievements are mostly molehills, with of course a few exceptions such as *Desire Under the Elms*, *Ah, Wilderness*, *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night;* the early 'sea plays' are also very good; the rest is silence. It is complained of his admirers that they confound aspiration with achievement, intention with realization. Now I think it is undeniable that O'Neill did not always realize his undoubtedly sincere and authentic vision, and therefore there may not be much point in discussing the intellectual significance etc., of those works of his that have failed to become truly dramatic. He can be, as in *The Iceman Cometh*, verbose, repetitious, rigid in planning, contrived and obvious in his symbolism; his plays are often cluttered with theatrical devices that only serve to bring home painfully his lack of a poetic language. And so on—one can go on for a long while with a list of O'Neill's shortcomings. And yet, it is equally undeniable that his urgent concern with the pressing and really important problems of life today somehow comes through even in reading him. He has never written elegant trifles for bored evenings. The hostile estimate which concentrates on the details of his work and finds, how greedily, evidence to dismiss him from a world perspective somehow does not reflect our total impression of the man's work. I think both his friends and his critics have been rather lacking in discrimination. 'They wholly mistake', said Dryden, 'the nature of criticism who think its business is principally to find fault. Criticism, as it was first instituted by Aristotle, was meant to be a standard of judging well; the chiefest part of which is to observe those excellencies

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

which should delight a reasonable reader'. I suggest that O'Neill is one of those writers—probably Scott is another—the structure of whose work, the over-all build-up, is much better than the individual details. This sounds logically absurd, but it is true, I think, I do not have the time now to argue it out here, and I shall content myself, instead, with an analogy. The naya paisa coin which some of us have actually seen is almost of no value in itself. But a hundred of it makes a rupee a serviceable and desirable coin to possess. So in individual detail, O'Neill's work is admittedly slipshod and unsatisfactory; in total effect, it is very much better. An example of this textual weakness and structural strength is the play I am now talking about, *The Iceman Cometh*. I shall not enumerate its textual defects; Professor Eric Bentley has done that job to cruel perfection in his essay, 'Trying to Like O'Neill'. I shall, on the contrary, outline the themes which hold the play together.

The title of the play probably alludes to the Biblical declaration, 'Behold, the bridegroom cometh', which in its context is said to be a *memento mori*, the bridegroom standing for death. 'Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh'. The word, iceman, also recalls the ice age when life is frozen into extinction, and the title further alludes to the very welcome visits of the iceman in summer.

The scene of the play is set in the saloon-bar of Harry Hope. It is a cheap gin-mill serving the five-cent whisky of the last-resort variety situated on the downtown West side of New York. The name of Harry Hope indicates, as in a Morality, his nature and the nature of the people who haunt his saloon. They are the characters of the play. They are thorough down-and-out failures who try to hide the fact of their failure from themselves and from the world by romanticizing their past and by glorifying the never-never future. They are almost always drunk on the rotgut whisky which Harry Hope generously provides them on credit. Harry himself is described as a soft-hearted slob who knows that his customers and his bartenders also are all cheats, but he cannot bring himself to throw them out though he tells them and himself too that he will do so very shortly. He has not set foot outside his hotel for nearly twenty years, ever since his wife died whom he has so built up in his lying imagination that instead of the 'god damned bitch' that she was in truth,

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

according to her own brother, she has come to be a *sati*, an ideal wife. This romantizing of the past, this total withdrawal from present reality, and as we also see in the play, this glorification of a non-existent future, are all represented in the play in the continuous boozing of Harry and his roomers. In their several ways, they are all of them pipe dreamers, a description that is often repeated in the play. Two of these roomers deserve some special notice. Larry Slade was an anarchist once upon a time. He gave it up because, so he alleges, he realized that men do not in fact wish to be saved; they are not prepared to give up their possessiveness and their monstrous greed. And now he has lost all desire to live and is looking forward to his own death. So he thinks and says—that is his pipe dream. The truth is that he gave up the Anarchist Movement because he was living with a woman who was also a prominent leader of the Movement and she was not faithful to him; she believed in 'free love'. Larry's love of death is all a sham which hides a fear of life. The second pipe dreamer, is Parritt, the son of this quondam mistress of Larry Slade. The boy betrayed the gang to the Police, and was responsible thus for the arrest and life-long incarceration of his own mother. He thinks that he did so because he wanted money to spend on his women; later he claims that he wanted to save America from the fury of anarchism. Another pipe dream. In fact he sold out because he hated his mother for her 'free' ways. He is now suffering from an unbearable sense of guilt and has come to Harry's hotel because Larry Slade who still in his heart of heart loves the woman, lives there, and is the best qualified to prescribe an expiatory punishment for this crime of mother-hatred.

The roomers are all looking forward to the coming of Hickey, the iceman of the title of the play. He is a hardware salesman who annually visits the saloon to take part in the birthday celebrations of Harry Hope. Hickey is a genial boon-companion, free with his money in treating his friends to as much booze as they can hold. But this time there is a change in him. He has given up drink and has instead acquired a Purpose. He feels that he has been Saved, and is eager, he thinks it his duty, to confer the gospel that has been vouchsafed him on his friends also. He wants to liberate them from the guilt and remorse that drive them to self-deception and pipe-dreaming. He begins the cure, but

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

finds that the results are somewhat unexpected. The bums are at first resentful and angry. When they finally do receive the gospel and discover one another's true status they call one another by the names they have always richly deserved and they finally come to blows. With Harry, in particular, the results are pathetic and alarming. He sinks into total depression when he realizes his true nature and his late wife's. Hickey is himself surprised and worried: 'You are beginning to worry me. Something's holding you up somewhere. I don't see why—you have faced the truth about yourself. You're done what you had to do to kill your nagging pipe dreams. It knocks you cold, but only for a minute. Then you see it was the only possible way to peace. And you feel happy. Like I did. That's what worries me about you, guv'nor. It's time you began to feel happy . . .' It is not all men who feel exhilarated when they are brought to self-recognition. It is not all men who are better for their self-knowledge. Some people calmly acquiesce in their shame. Rocky, the bartender, gaily admits that he is a pimp all right, accepts the fact and tries to recruit others to his profession. That is the first theme of the play: the futility of self-knowledge when it is forced on bums who don't want it or who are happier without it. The only person who is 'converted' is Larry Slade. He recognizes that he is a coward, afraid to live or to die. Parritt also finally acknowledges the true curse of his betrayal of his mother and commits suicide.

The second theme of the play is narrated in the story of Hickey by Hickey himself. He was the son of a minister in Indiana, and early learnt from his father two unintended lessons, an invincible aversion to religion and the art of high-pressure salesmanship. He took to drink, gambling and whoring, and went through the rake's progress systematically. Everybody set him down for a no-good bum except Evelyn, the girl who loved him. She later insisted on marrying him even though he himself warned her that he was no good and that she had better look elsewhere. She told him firmly that nothing but death could stop her from loving him. She married him in due course, and of course the marriage did not bring about in any change in his ways. But Evelyn never lost her faith in him. The situation ultimately got on his nerves; he was married to a saint, and he could never relax; he had to be constantly on the stretch, as it were, trying to

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

be something other than himself. Even when he infected her with venereal disease, she forgave him, and assured him that he would amend. She was a relentless forgiver. Her pipe dream, in short, was that the best way to change a man is to forgive him continuously. The psychological truth, however, is that paradise without purgatory is a burden on the conscience. When a man is punished for his guilt, he emerges clean, independent, his dignity restored and under obligation to nobody. Forgiveness is not enough either. It depends on the nature of the man whom one forgives whether the forgiveness will do him any good.

The third theme of the play is enacted in the course of Hickey's narration of his story. When the time came for Hickey to make his annual visit to Harry's saloon, he knew in his bones that he would not be able to keep away, that he would again break his promise to his wife, would again hurt her and would again be forgiven. He went into Evelyn's bedroom to tell her that this was really the end, that she had better throw him over. She was peacefully asleep. And it suddenly came to him that the best way of saving her from final and permanent disillusionment was to kill her as she slept. He shot her through the head, he tells his companions, because he loved her so and wanted to spare her the torment of the knowledge of failure. But even as he alleges this claim of a great love, the words leave his lips that he spoke to her after shooting her: 'Well, you know what you can do with your pipe dream now, you damned bitch'. The relentless forgiveness of the wife generated in him an intense self-loathing, and of this self-loathing was born a burning hatred, fierce because unconscious, of the women who had so utterly destroyed his self-respect. He does not know it till the last. That was his pipe dream. It is impossible to know oneself; there is a built-in predilection in the human mind for self-deception. And perhaps, so the play insinuates, it is just as well. Life would be intolerable, would in fact freeze into extinction, without a few warm pipe dreams.

The Iceman Cometh, is a wry ironic comedy of what happened when a self-appointed Paul—retired from the hardware business —tried to drag a bunch of reluctant bums on what he thought was the road to Damascus, what happened to him and to his disciples. Of course it is a question for discussion whether the

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

play's characters and action have any larger, microcosmic significance. I myself doubt it. I think the play is memorable chiefly for the magnificent evocation of the lives of down-and-out-bums and of the atmosphere of futility and negation. They add, as much as the three themes sketched here, to the total unity of the play.

PRINTED IN INDIA BY K. A. KORULA AT THE WESLEY PRESS, MYSORE

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi

Digitization by eGangotri and Sarayu Trust. Funding by MoE-IKS

Forthcoming

AN INTRODUCTION TO AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

Edited by

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH

The Literary Criterion is glad to announce the publication this year of a special number with contributions from out-standing Australian Poets, Scholars and Literary Critics devoted to Australian Literature.

For copies please contact:

MESSRS POPULAR PRAKASHAN

35 C, TARDEO ROAD, BOMBAY-34, W.B.

CC0. In Public Domain. Sri Sri Anandamayee Ashram Collection, Varanasi